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OR

THE CHILDREN OF NIGHT

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LUCRETIA.

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OR

THE CHILDREN OF NIGHT

BY

EDWARD BULWER LYTTON

(LORD LYTTON)

"*Dove il sol tace.*"
DANTE, *L'Inferno*, Cant. i. l. 60

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PREFACE TO THE EDITION OF 1853.

LUCRETIA; or, The Children of Night, was begun simultaneously with *The Caxtons, a Family Picture.* The two fictions were intended as *pendants;* both serving, amongst other collateral aims and objects, to show the influence of home education,—of early circumstance and example upon after character and conduct. *Lucretia* was completed and published before *The Caxtons.* The moral design of the first was misunderstood and assailed; that of the last was generally acknowledged and approved; the moral design in both was nevertheless precisely the same. But in one it was sought through the darker side of human nature, in the other, through the more sunny and cheerful—one shows the evil, the other the salutary influences of early circumstance and training. Necessarily, therefore, the first resorts to the tragic elements of awe and distress—the second to the comic elements of humour and agreeable emotion. These differences serve to explain the different reception that awaited the two, and may teach us how little the real conception of an author is known, and how little it is cared for: we judge—not by the purpose he conceives, but according as the impressions he effects are

pleasurable or painful. But while I cannot acquiesce in much of the hostile criticism this fiction produced at its first appearance, I readily allow that, as a mere question of art, the story might have been improved in itself, and rendered more acceptable to the reader, by diminishing the gloom of the catastrophe. In this edition I have endeavoured to do so; and the victim whose fate in the former cast of the work most revolted the reader, as a violation of the trite but amiable law of Poetical Justice, is saved from the hands of *The Children of Night.* Perhaps—whatever the faults of this work—it equals most of its companions in the sustainment of interest, and in that coincidence between the gradual development of motive or passion, and the sequences of external events constituting plot, which mainly distinguish the physical awe of tragedy from the coarse horrors of melodrama. I trust, at least, that I shall *now* find few readers, who will not readily acknowledge that the delineation of crime has only been employed for the grave and impressive purpose which brings it within the due province of the poet, as an element of terror and a warning to the heart.

LONDON, *December 7th*

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION.

It is somewhere about four years since I appeared before the public as the writer of a fiction, which I then intimated would probably be my last; but bad habits are stronger than good intentions. When Fabricio, in his hospital, resolved upon abjuring the vocation of the Poet, he was, in truth, recommencing his desperate career by a Farewell to the Muses:—I need not apply the allusion.

I must own, however, that there had long been a desire in my mind to trace, in some work or other, the strange and secret ways through which that Arch-ruler of Civilisation, familiarly called "Money," insinuates itself into our thoughts and motives, our hearts and actions; affecting those who undervalue as those who over-estimate its importance; ruining virtues in the spendthrift no less than engendering vices in the miser. But when I half implied my farewell to the character of a novelist, I had imagined that this conception might be best worked out upon the stage. After some unpublished and imperfect attempts towards so realising my design, I found either that the subject was too wide for the limits of the Drama, or that I

wanted that faculty of concentration which alone enables the dramatist to compress multiform varieties into a very limited compass. With this design, I desired to unite some exhibition of what seems to me a principal vice in the hot and emulous chase for happiness or fame, fortune or knowledge, which is almost synonymous with the cant phrase of "the March of Intellect," in that crisis of society to which we have arrived. The vice I allude to is Impatience. That eager desire to press forward, not so much to conquer obstacles as to elude them; that gambling with the solemn destinies of life, seeking ever to set success upon the chance of a die; that hastening from the wish conceived to the end accomplished; that thirst after quick returns to ingenious toil, and breathless spurrings along short cuts to the goal, which we see everywhere around us, from the Mechanics' Institute to the Stock Market,—beginning in education with the primers of infancy—deluging us with *Philosophies for the Million*, and *Sciences made Easy;* characterising the books of our writers, the speeches of our statesmen, no less than the dealings of our speculators, seem, I confess, to me to constitute a very diseased and very general symptom of the times. I hold that the greatest friend to man is labour; that knowledge without toil, if possible, were worthless; that toil in pursuit of knowledge is the best knowledge we can attain; that the continuous effort for fame is nobler than fame itself; that it is not wealth suddenly acquired which is deserving of homage, but the virtues which a man exercises in the slow pursuit of wealth,—the abilities so called forth, the self-denials so imposed; in a word, that Labour and

Patience are the true schoolmasters on earth. While occupied with these ideas and this belief, whether right or wrong, and slowly convinced that it was only in that species of composition with which I was most familiar that I could work out some portion of the plan that I began to contemplate, I became acquainted with the histories of two criminals, existing in our own age ;— so remarkable, whether from the extent and darkness of the guilt committed—whether from the glittering accomplishments and lively temper of the one, the profound knowledge and intellectual capacities of the other—that the examination and analysis of characters so perverted became a study full of intense, if gloomy, interest.

In these persons there appear to have been as few redeemable points as can be found in Human Nature, so far as such points may be traced in the kindly instincts and generous passions which do sometimes accompany the perpetration of great crimes, and, without excusing the individual, vindicate the species. Yet, on the other hand, their sanguinary wickedness was not the dull ferocity of brutes; —it was accompanied with instruction and culture:—nay, it seemed to me, on studying their lives, and pondering over their own letters, that through their cultivation itself we could arrive at the secret of the ruthless and atrocious pre-eminence in evil these Children of Night had attained —that here the monster vanished into the mortal, and the phenomena that seemed aberrations from nature were explained.

I could not resist the temptation of reducing to a tale

the materials which had so engrossed my interest and tasked my inquiries. And in this attempt, various incidental opportunities have occurred, if not of completely carrying out, still of incidentally illustrating, my earlier design ; — of showing the influence of Mammon upon our most secret selves, of reproving the impatience which is engendered by a civilisation—that with much of the good brings all the evils of competition, and of tracing throughout, all the influences of early household life upon our subsequent conduct and career. In such incidental bearings the moral may doubtless be more obvious than in the delineation of the darker and rarer crime which forms the staple of my narrative. For in extraordinary guilt, we are slow to recognise ordinary warnings—we say to the peaceful conscience, "This concerns thee not!"—whereas at each instance of familiar fault and commonplace error we own a direct and sensible admonition. Yet in the portraiture of gigantic crime, poets have rightly found their sphere, and fulfilled their destiny, of teachers. Those terrible truths, which appal us in the guilt of Macbeth, or the villany of Iago, have their moral uses not less than the popular infirmities of Tom Jones, or the everyday hypocrisy of Blifil.

Incredible as it may seem, the crimes herein related took place within the last seventeen years. There has been no exaggeration as to their extent, no great departure from their details—the means employed, even that which seems most far-fetched (the instrument of the poisoned ring), have their foundation in literal facts. Nor have I much altered the social position of the criminals, nor in the least overrated

their attainments and intelligence. In those more salient essentials which will most, perhaps, provoke the Reader's incredulous wonder, I narrate a history, not invent a fiction.[1] All that Romance which our own time affords is not more the romance than the philosophy of the time. Tragedy never quits the world—it surrounds us everywhere. We have but to look, wakeful and vigilant, abroad,—and from the age of Pelops to that of Borgia, the same crimes, though under different garbs, will stalk on our paths. Each age comprehends in itself specimens of every virtue and every vice which has ever inspired our love or moved our horror.

LONDON, *November 1st*, 1846.

[1] These criminals were not, however, in actual life, as in the novel, intimates and accomplices. Their crimes were of similar character, effected by similar agencies, and committed at dates which embrace their several careers of guilt within the same period: but I have no authority to suppose that the one was known to the other.

CONTENTS.

PART THE FIRST.

PAGE

PROLOGUE TO PART THE FIRST 17

CHAPTER I.

A FAMILY GROUP 22

CHAPTER II.

LUCRETIA 55

CHAPTER III.

CONFERENCES 81

CHAPTER IV.

GUY'S OAK 95

CHAPTER V.

HOUSEHOLD TREASON 107

CHAPTER VI.

THE WILL 116

CHAPTER VII.

THE ENGAGEMENT 124

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DISCOVERY 143

CHAPTER IX.

PAGE

A SOUL WITHOUT HOPE 150

CHAPTER X.

THE RECONCILIATION BETWEEN FATHER AND SON 159

EPILOGUE TO PART THE FIRST 168

PART THE SECOND.

PROLOGUE TO PART THE SECOND 211

CHAPTER I.

THE CORONATION 224

CHAPTER II.

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT 239

CHAPTER III.

EARLY TRAINING FOR AN UPRIGHT GENTLEMAN 252

CHAPTER IV.

JOHN ARDWORTH 258

CHAPTER V.

THE WEAVERS AND THE WOOF 278

CHAPTER VI.

THE LAWYER AND THE BODY-SNATCHER 283

CHAPTER VII.

THE RAPE OF THE MATTRESS 294

CHAPTER VIII.

PERCIVAL VISITS LUCRETIA 302

CHAPTER IX.

THE ROSE BENEATH THE UPAS 307

CHAPTER X.

PAGE

THE RATTLE OF THE SNAKE 319

CHAPTER XI.

LOVE AND INNOCENCE 324

CHAPTER XII.

SUDDEN CELEBRITY AND PATIENT HOPE 328

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LOSS OF THE CROSSING 339

CHAPTER XIV.

NEWS FROM GRABMAN 344

CHAPTER XV.

VARIETIES 351

CHAPTER XVI.

THE INVITATION TO LAUGHTON 362

CHAPTER XVII.

THE WAKING OF THE SERPENT 368

CHAPTER XVIII.

RETROSPECT 374

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. GRABMAN'S ADVENTURES 394

CHAPTER XX.

MORE OF MRS. JOPLIN 400

CHAPTER XXI.

BECK'S DISCOVERY 405

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TAPESTRY CHAMBER 414

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SHADES ON THE DIAL 417

CHAPTER XXIV.

PAGE
MURDER, TOWARDS HIS DESIGN, MOVES LIKE A GHOST 429

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MESSENGER SPEEDS 432

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE SPY FLIES 436

CHAPTER XXVII.

LUCRETIA REGAINS HER SON 443

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LOTS VANISH WITHIN THE URN 447

EPILOGUE TO PART THE SECOND 450

LUCRETIA;

OR,

THE CHILDREN OF NIGHT.

PART THE FIRST.

PROLOGUE TO PART THE FIRST.

In an apartment at Paris, one morning during the Reign of Terror, a man, whose age might be somewhat under thirty, sat before a table covered with papers, arranged and labelled with the methodical precision of a mind fond of order and habituated to business. Behind him rose a tall bookcase, surmounted with a bust of Robespierre, and the shelves were filled chiefly with works of a scientific character; amongst which the greater number were on chemistry and medicine. There were to be seen also many rare books on alchemy, the great Italian historians, some English philosophical treatises, and a few MSS. in Arabic. The absence from this collection of the stormy literature of the day seemed to denote that the owner was a quiet student, living apart from the strife and passions of the Revolution. This supposition was, however, disproved by certain papers on the table, which were formally and laconically labelled "Reports on Lyons," and by packets of letters in the handwritings of Robespierre and Couthon. At one of the windows a young boy was earnestly engaged in some occupation which appeared to excite the curiosity

of the person just described; for this last, after examining the child's movements for a few moments with a silent scrutiny, that betrayed but little of the half-complacent, half-melancholy affection with which busy man is apt to regard childhood, rose noiselessly from his seat, approached the boy, and looked over his shoulder unobserved. In a crevice of the wood by the window, a huge black spider had formed his web; the child had just discovered another spider, and placed it in the meshes; he was watching the result of his operations. The intrusive spider stood motionless in the midst of the web, as if fascinated. The rightful possessor was also quiescent; but a very fine ear might have caught a low humming sound, which probably augured no hospitable intentions to the invader. Anon, the stranger insect seemed suddenly to awake from its amaze; it evinced alarm, and turned to fly; the huge spider darted forward—the boy uttered a chuckle of delight. The man's pale lip curled into a sinister sneer, and he glided back to his seat. There, leaning his face on his hand, he continued to contemplate the child. That child might have furnished to an artist a fitting subject for fair and blooming infancy. His light hair, tinged deeply, it is true, with red, hung in sleek and glittering abundance down his neck and shoulders. His features, seen in profile, were delicately and almost femininely proportioned; health glowed on his cheek, and his form, slight though it was, gave promise of singular activity and vigour. His dress was fantastic, and betrayed the taste of some fondly foolish mother; but the fine linen, trimmed with lace, was rumpled and stained, the velvet jacket unbrushed, the shoes soiled with dust;—slight tokens these of neglect, but serving to show that the foolish fondness which had invented the dress, had not of late presided over the toilet

"Child," said the man, first in French; and observing that the boy heeded him not—"child," he repeated in English, which he spoke well, though with a foreign accent—"child!"

The boy turned quickly.

"Has the great spider devoured the small one?"

"No, sir," said the boy, colouring, "the small one has had the best of it." The tone and heightened complexion of

the child seemed to give meaning to his words—at least, so the man thought, for a slight frown passed over his high, thoughtful brow.

"Spiders, then," he said, after a short pause, "are different from men; with us, the small do not get the better of the great. Hum! do you still miss your mother?"

"Oh, yes!"—and the boy advanced eagerly to the table.

"Well, you will see her once again."

"When?"

The man looked towards a clock on the mantelpiece—"Before that clock strikes. Now, go back to your spiders." The child looked irresolute and disinclined to obey; but a stern and terrible expression gathered slowly over the man's face; and the boy growing pale as he remarked it, crept back to the window.

The father—for such was the relation the owner of the room bore to the child—drew paper and ink towards him, and wrote for some minutes rapidly. Then starting up, he glanced at the clock, took his hat and cloak, which lay on a chair beside, drew up the collar of the mantle till it almost concealed his countenance, and said, "Now, boy, come with me; I have promised to show you an execution. I am going to keep my promise. Come!"

The boy clapped his hands with joy; and you might see then, child as he was, that those fair features were capable of a cruel and ferocious expression. The character of the whole face changed. He caught up his gay cap and plume, and followed his father into the streets.

Silently the two took their way towards the *Barrière du Trône.* At a distance they saw the crowd growing thick and dense, as throng after throng hurried past them; and the dreadful guillotine rose high in the light blue air. As they came into the skirts of the mob, the father, for the first time, took his child's hand. "I must get you a good place for the show," he said, with a quiet smile.

There was something in the grave, staid, courteous, yet haughty bearing of the man, that made the crowd give way as he passed. They got near the dismal scene, and

obtained entrance into a waggon already crowded with eager spectators.

And now they heard at a distance the harsh and lumbering roll of the tumbril that bore the victims, and the tramp of the horses which guarded the procession of death. The boy's whole attention was absorbed in expectation of the spectacle, and his ear was, perhaps, less accustomed to French, though born and reared in France, than to the language of his mother's lips—and she was English: thus he did not hear or heed certain observations of the bystanders, which made his father's pale cheek grow paler.

"What is the batch to-day?" quoth a butcher in the waggon.

"Scarce worth the baking—only two:—but one, they say, is an aristocrat—a *ci-devant* marquis," answered a carpenter.

"Ah! a marquis!—*Bon!*—And the other?"

"Only a dancer; but a pretty one it is true: I could pity her, but she is English." And as he pronounced the last word, with a tone of inexpressible contempt, the butcher spat, as if in nausea.

"*Mort diable!* a spy of Pitt's, no doubt. What did they discover?"

A man, better dressed than the rest, turned round with a smile, and answered—"Nothing worse than a lover, I believe; but that lover was a *proscrit.* The *ci-devant* marquis was caught disguised in her apartment. She betrayed for him a good easy friend of the people, who had long loved her, and revenge is sweet."

The man whom we have accompanied nervously twitched up the collar of his cloak, and his compressed lips told that he felt the anguish of the laugh that circled round him.

"They are coming! There they are!" cried the boy in ecstatic excitement.

"That's the way to bring up citizens," said the butcher patting the child's shoulder, and opening a still better view for him at the edge of the waggon.

The crowd now abruptly gave way. The tumbril was in sight. A man, young and handsome, standing erect and with folded arms in the fatal vehicle, looked along the mob with an eye

of careless scorn. Though he wore the dress of a workman, the most unpractised glance could detect, in his mien and bearing, one of the hated *noblesse*, whose characteristics came out even more forcibly at the hour of death. On the lip was that smile of gay and insolent levity, on the brow that gallant if reckless contempt of physical danger, which had signalised the hero-coxcombs of the old *régime*. Even the rude dress was worn with a certain air of foppery, and the bright hair was carefully adjusted as if for the holiday of the headsman. As the eyes of the young noble wandered over the fierce faces of that horrible assembly, while a roar of hideous triumph answered the look, in which for the last time the *gentilhomme* spoke his scorn of the *canaille*, the child's father lowered the collar of his cloak, and slowly raised his hat from his brow. The eye of the marquis rested upon the countenance thus abruptly shown to him, and which suddenly became individualised amongst the crowd,—that eye instantly lost its calm contempt. A shudder passed visibly over his frame, and his cheek grew blanched with terror. The mob saw the change, but not the cause, and loud and louder rose their triumphant yell. The sound recalled the pride of the young noble;—he started—lifted his crest erect, and sought again to meet the look which had appalled him. But he could no longer single it out among the crowd. Hat and cloak once more hid the face of the foe, and crowds of eager heads intercepted the view. The young marquis's lips muttered; he bent down, and then the crowd caught sight of his companion, who was being lifted up from the bottom of the tumbril, where she had flung herself in horror and despair. The crowd grew still in a moment, as the pale face of one, familiar to most of them, turned wildly from place to place in the dreadful scene, vainly and madly through its silence imploring life and pity. How often had the sight of that face, not then pale and haggard, but wreathed with rosy smiles, sufficed to draw down the applause of the crowded theatre—how, then, had those breasts, now fevered by the thirst of blood, held hearts spellbound by the airy movements of that exquisite form writhing now in no stage-mime agony! Plaything of the city—minion to the light amusement of the hour—frail child of Cytherea and the Graces,

what relentless fate has conducted *thee* to the shambles? Butterfly of the summer, why should a nation rise to break *thee* upon the wheel? A sense of the mockery of such an execution, of the horrible burlesque that would sacrifice to the necessities of a mighty people so slight an offering, made itself felt among the crowd. There was a low murmur of shame and indignation. The dangerous sympathy of the mob was perceived by the officer in attendance. Hastily he made the sign to the headsman, and, as he did so, a child's cry was heard in the English tongue—"Mother—mother!" The father's hand grasped the child's arm with an iron pressure; the crowd swam before the boy's eyes; the air seemed to stifle him, and become blood-red; only through the hum, and the tramp, and the roll of the drums, he heard a low voice hiss in his ear—"Learn how they perish who betray me!"

As the father said these words, again his face was bare, and the woman whose ear, amidst the dull insanity of fear, had caught the cry of her child's voice, saw that face, and fell back insensible in the arms of the headsman.

CHAPTER I.

A FAMILY GROUP.

ONE July evening, at the commencement of the present century, several persons were somewhat picturesquely grouped along an old-fashioned terrace, which skirted the garden-side of a manor-house that had considerable pretensions to baronial dignity. The architecture was of the most enriched and elaborate style belonging to the reign of James the First: the porch, opening on the terrace, with its mullion window above, was encased with pilasters and reliefs, at once ornamental and massive; and the large square tower in which it was placed, was surmounted by a stone falcon, whose talons griped fiercely a scutcheon blazoned with the five-pointed stars which heralds recognise as the arms of St. John. On either side this tower

extended long wings, the dark brickwork of which was relieved with noble stone casements and carved pediments; the high roof was partially concealed by a balustrade, perforated not inelegantly into arabesque designs; and what architects call "the sky line" was broken with imposing effect by tall chimney-shafts, of various form and fashion. These wings terminated in angular towers, similar to the centre, though kept duly subordinate to it both in size and decoration, and crowned with stone cupolas. A low balustrade, of later date than that which adorned the roof, relieved by vases and statues, bordered the terrace, from which a double flight of steps descended to a smooth lawn, intersected by broad gravel walks, shadowed by vast and stately cedars, and gently and gradually mingling with the wilder scenery of the park, from which it was only divided by a ha-ha.

Upon the terrace, and under cover of a temporary awning, sat the owner, Sir Miles St. John of Laughton, a comely old man, dressed with faithful precision to the costume which he had been taught to consider appropriate to his rank of gentleman, and which was not yet wholly obsolete and eccentric. His hair, still thick and luxuriant, was carefully powdered, and collected into a club behind. His nether man attired in grey breeches and pearl-coloured silk stockings; his vest of silk, opening wide at the breast, and showing a profusion of frill, slightly sprinkled with the pulvilio of his favourite Martinique; his three-cornered hat, placed on a stool at his side, with a gold-headed crutch-cane,—hat made rather to be carried in the hand than worn on the head, the diamond in his shirt-breast, the diamond on his finger, the ruffles at his wrist,—all bespoke the gallant, who had chatted with Lord Chesterfield, and supped with Mrs. Clive. On a table before him, were placed two or three decanters of wine, the fruits of the season, an enamelled snuff-box, in which was set the portrait of a female - perhaps the Chloe or Phillis of his early love-ditties; a lighted taper, a small china jar containing tobacco, and three or four pipes of homely clay—for cherry-sticks and meerschaums were not then in fashion, and Sir Miles St. John, once a gay and sparkling beau, now a popular country gentleman great at county meetings and sheep-

shearing festivals, had taken to smoking, as in harmony with his bucolic transformation; an old setter lay dozing at his feet; a small spaniel—old, too—was sauntering lazily in the immediate neighbourhood, looking gravely out for such stray bits of biscuit as had been thrown forth to provoke him to exercise, and which hitherto had escaped his attention. Half seated, half reclined, on the balustrade, apart from the Baronet, but within reach of his conversation, lolled a man in the prime of life, with an air of unmistakable and sovereign elegance and distinction. Mr. Vernon was a guest from London: and the London man, the man of clubs, and dinners and routs—of noon loungings through Bond Street, and nights spent with the Prince of Wales, seemed stamped not more upon the careful carelessness of his dress, and upon the worn expression of his delicate features, than upon the listless *ennui*, which, characterising both his face and attitude, appeared to take pity on himself for having been entrapped into the country.

Yet we should convey an erroneous impression of Mr. Vernon, if we designed, by the words "listless *ennui*," to depict the slumberous insipidity of more modern affectation—it was not the *ennui* of a man to whom *ennui* is habitual; it was rather the indolent prostration that fills up the intervals of excitement. At that day, the word *blasé* was unknown; men had not enough sentiment for satiety. There was a kind of Bacchanalian fury in the life led by those leaders of fashion, among whom Mr. Vernon was not the least distinguished; it was a day of deep drinking, of high play, of jovial reckless dissipation—of strong appetite for fun and riot—of four-in-hand coachmanship—of prize-fighting—of a strange sort of barbarous manliness, that strained every nerve of the constitution; a race of life, in which three-fourths of the competitors died half-way in the hippodrome. What is now the Dandy was then the Buck: and something of the Buck, though subdued by a chaster taste than fell to the ordinary members of his class, was apparent in Mr. Vernon's costume as well as air. Intricate folds of muslin, arranged in prodigious bows and ends, formed the cravat, which Brummel had not yet arisen to reform; his hat, of a very peculiar shape, low at the crown and broad at the

brim, was worn with an air of devil-me-care defiance ; his watch-chain, garnished with a profusion of rings and seals, hung low from his white waistcoat ; and the adaptation of his nankeen inexpressibles to his well-shaped limbs was a masterpiece of art. His whole dress and air was not what could properly be called foppish—it was rather what at that time was called "rakish." Few could so closely approach vulgarity without being vulgar : of that privileged few, Mr. Vernon was one of the elect. Further on, and near the steps descending into the garden, stood a man in an attitude of profound abstraction ; his arms folded, his eyes bent on the ground, his brows slightly contracted : his dress was a plain black surtout, and pantaloons of the same colour ; something both in the fashion of the dress, and still more in the face of the man, bespoke the foreigner.

Sir Miles St. John was an accomplished person for that time of day : he had made the grand tour ; he had bought pictures and statues ; he spoke and wrote well in the modern languages ; and being rich, hospitable, social, and not averse from the reputation of a patron, he had opened his house freely to the host of emigrants whom the French Revolution had driven to our coasts. Olivier Dalibard, a man of considerable learning and rare scientific attainments, had been tutor in the house of the Marquis de G——, a French nobleman, known many years before to the old Baronet. The Marquis and his family had been among the first *émigrés* at the outbreak of the Revolution. The tutor had remained behind ; for at that time no danger appeared to threaten those who pretended to no other aristocracy than that of letters. Contrary, as he said, with repentant modesty, to his own inclinations, he had been compelled, not only for his own safety, but for that of his friends, to take some part in the subsequent events of the Revolution—a part far from sincere, though so well had he simulated the patriot, that he had won the personal favour and protection of Robespierre : nor till the fall of that virtuous exterminator had he withdrawn from the game of politics, and effected in disguise his escape to England As, whether from kindly or other motives, he had employed the power of his position in the esteem of Robespierre, to save certain noble heads from the

guillotine—amongst others, the two brothers of the Marquis de G——, he was received with grateful welcome by his former patrons, who readily pardoned his career of Jacobinism, from their belief in his excuses, and their obligations to the services which that very career had enabled him to render to their kindred. Olivier Dalibard had accompanied the Marquis and his family in one of the frequent visits they paid to Laughton; and when the Marquis finally quitted England, and fixed his refuge at Vienna, with some connections of his wife's, he felt a lively satisfaction at the thought of leaving his friend honourably, if unambitiously, provided for, as secretary and librarian to Sir Miles St. John. In fact, the scholar, who possessed considerable powers of fascination, had won no less favour with the English baronet than he had with the French dictator. He played well both at chess and backgammon; he was an extraordinary accountant; he had a variety of information upon all points, that rendered him more convenient than any cyclopædia in Sir Miles's library; and as he spoke both English and Italian with a correctness and fluency extremely rare in a Frenchman, he was of considerable service in teaching languages to (as well as directing the general literary education of) Sir Miles's favourite niece—whom we shall take an early opportunity to describe at length.

Nevertheless, there had been one serious obstacle to Dalibard's acceptance of the appointment offered to him by Sir Miles. Dalibard had under his charge a young orphan boy of some ten or twelve years old—a boy whom Sir Miles was not long in suspecting to be the scholar's son. This child had come from France with Dalibard, and (while the Marquis's family were in London) remained under the eye and care of his guardian or father, whichever was the true connection between the two. But this superintendence became impossible, if Dalibard settled in Hampshire with Sir Miles St. John, and the boy remained in London; nor, though the generous old gentleman offered to pay for the child's schooling, would Dalibard consent to part with him. At last, the matter was arranged: the boy was invited to Laughton on a visit, and was so lively, yet so well mannered, that he became a favourite,

and was now fairly quartered in the house with his reputed father: and not to make an unnecessary mystery of this connection, such was in truth the relationship between Olivier Dalibard and Honoré Gabriel Varney—a name significant of the double and illegitimate origin—a French father, an English mother; dropping, however, the purely French appellation of Honoré he went familiarly by that of Gabriel. Half-way down the steps stood the lad, pencil and tablet in hand, sketching. Let us look over his shoulder—it is his father's likeness—a countenance in itself not very remarkable at the first glance, for the features were small, but when examined, it was one that most persons, women especially, would have pronounced handsome, and to which none could deny the higher praise of thought and intellect. A native of Provence, with some Italian blood in his veins—for his grandfather, a merchant of Marseilles, had married into a Florentine family settled at Leghorn—the dark complexion, common with those in the South, had been subdued, probably by the habits of the student, into a bronze and steadfast paleness, which seemed almost fair by the contrast of the dark hair which he wore unpowdered, and the still darker brows which hung thick and prominent over clear grey eyes. Compared with the features, the skull was disproportionally large, both behind and before; and a physiognomist would have drawn conclusions more favourable to the power than the tenderness of the Provençal's character, from the compact closeness of the lips and the breadth and massiveness of the iron jaw. But the son's sketch exaggerated every feature, and gave to the expression a malignant and terrible irony, not now, at least apparent in the quiet and meditative aspect. Gabriel himself as he stood, would have been a more tempting study to many an artist. It is true that he was small for his years; but his frame had a vigour in its light proportions, which came from a premature and almost adolescent symmetry of shape and muscular development. The countenance, however, had much of effeminate beauty; the long hair reached the shoulders, but did not curl; straight, fine, and glossy as a girl's, and, in colour, of the pale auburn, tinged with red, which rarely alters in hue

as childhood matures to man; the complexion was dazzlingly clear and fair. Nevertheless, there was something so hard in the lip, so bold, though not open, in the brow, that the girlishness of complexion, and even of outline, could not leave on the whole, an impression of effeminacy. All the hereditary keenness and intelligence were stamped upon his face at that moment; but the expression had also a large share of the very irony and malice which he had conveyed to his caricature. The drawing itself was wonderfully vigorous and distinct, showing great artistic promise, and done with the rapidity and ease which betrayed practice. Suddenly his father turned, and with as sudden a quickness, the boy concealed his tablet in his vest; and the sinister expression of his face smoothed into a timorous smile, as his eye encountered Dalibard's. The father beckoned to the boy, who approached with alacrity. "Gabriel," whispered the Frenchman, in his own tongue, "where are they at this moment?"

The boy pointed silently towards one of the cedars. Dalibard mused an instant, and then slowly descending the steps, took his noiseless way over the smooth turf towards the tree. Its boughs drooped low and spread wide; and not till he was within a few paces of the spot, could his eye perceive two forms, seated on a bench under the dark green canopy. He then paused and contemplated them.

The one was a young man, whose simple dress and subdued air strongly contrasted the artificial graces and the modish languor of Mr. Vernon; but though wholly without that nameless distinction which sometimes characterises those conscious of pure race, and habituated to the atmosphere of courts, he had at least Nature's stamp of aristocracy in a form eminently noble, and features of manly, but surpassing beauty, which were not rendered less engaging by an expression of modest timidity. He seemed to be listening with thoughtful respect to his companion, a young female by his side, who was speaking to him with an earnestness visible in her gestures and her animated countenance. And though there was much to notice in the various persons scattered over the scene, not one, perhaps —not the graceful Vernon—not the thoughtful scholar, nor his

fair-haired, hard-lipped son—not even the handsome listener she addressed—no, not one there would so have arrested the eye, whether of a physiognomist or a casual observer, as that young girl—Sir Miles St. John's favourite niece and presumptive heiress.

But as at that moment the expression of her face differed from that habitual to it, we defer its description.

"Do not"—such were her words to her companion,—"do not alarm yourself by exaggerating the difficulties; do not even contemplate them—those be my care. Mainwaring, when I loved you, when, seeing that your diffidence or your pride forbade you to be the first to speak, I overstepped the modesty or the dissimulation of my sex: when I said,—'Forget that I am the reputed heiress of Laughton; see in me but the faults and merits of the human being; of the wild unregulated girl; see in me but Lucretia Clavering'"—here her cheeks blushed, and her voice sank into a lower and more tremulous whisper—"'and love her if you can!'—when I went thus far, do not think I had not measured all the difficulties in the way of our union, and felt that I could surmount them."

"But," answered Mainwaring, hesitatingly, "can you conceive it possible that your uncle ever will consent? Is not pride—the pride of family—almost the leading attribute of his character? Did he not discard your mother—his own sister—from his house and heart, for no other offence but a second marriage, which he deemed beneath her? Has he ever even consented to see, much less to receive, your half-sister—the child of that marriage? Is not his very affection for you interwoven with his pride in you, with his belief in your ambition? Has he not summoned your cousin, Mr. Vernon, for the obvious purpose of favouring a suit which he considers worthy of you, and which, if successful, will unite the two branches of his ancient house? How is it possible that he can ever hear without a scorn and indignation which would be fatal to your fortunes, that your heart has presumed to choose, in William Mainwaring, a man without ancestry or career?"

"Not without career!" interrupted Lucretia, proudly. "Do you think, if you were master of Laughton, that your career

would not be more brilliant than that of yon indolent, luxurious coxcomb? Do you think that I could have been poor-hearted enough to love you if I had not recognised in you energies and talents that correspond with my own ambition? For I am ambitious, as you know, and therefore my mind, as well as my heart, went with my love for you"

"Ah, Lucretia! but can Sir Miles St. John see my future rise in my present obscurity?"

"I do not say that he can, or will; but if you love me, we can wait. Do not fear the rivalry of Mr. Vernon. I shall know how to free myself from so tame a peril. We can wait—my uncle is old—his habits preclude the chance of a much longer life—he has already had severe attacks. We are young, dear Mainwaring: what is a year or two to those who hope?"

Mainwaring's face fell; and a displeasing chill passed through his veins. Could this young creature, her uncle's petted and trusted darling, she who should be the soother of his infirmities, the prop of his age, the sincerest mourner at his grave, weigh coldly thus the chances of his death, and point at once to the altar and the tomb?

He was saved from the embarrassment of reply by Dalibard's approach.

"More than half an hour absent," said the scholar in his own language, with a smile; and drawing out his watch, he placed it before their eyes: "do you not think that all will miss you? Do you suppose, Miss Clavering, that your uncle has not, ere this, asked for his fair niece? Come, and forestall him." He offered his arm to Lucretia as he spoke. She hesitated a moment, and then, turning to Mainwaring, held out her hand: he pressed it, though scarcely with a lover's warmth: and as she walked back to the terrace with Dalibard, the young man struck slowly into the opposite direction, and passing by a gate, over a foot-bridge, that led from the ha-ha into the park, bent his way towards a lake which gleamed below at some distance, half-concealed by groves of venerable trees, rich with the prodigal boughs of summer. Meanwhile, as they passed towards the house, Dalibard, still using his native tongue, thus accosted his pupil:—

"You must pardon me if I think more of your interests than you do; and pardon me no less if I encroach on your secrets and alarm your pride. This young man—can you be guilty of the folly of more than a passing caprice for his society?—of more than the amusement of playing with his vanity? Even if that be all, beware of entangling yourself in your own meshes."

"You do in truth offend me," said Lucretia, with calm haughtiness, "and you have not the right thus to speak to me."

"Not the right," repeated the Provençal, mournfully; "not the right!—then, indeed, I am mistaken in my pupil. Do you consider that I would have lowered my pride to remain here as a dependant; that, conscious of attainments and perhaps of abilities, that should win their way, even in exile, to distinction, I would have frittered away my life in these rustic shades, if I had not formed in you a deep and absorbing interest? in that interest I ground my right to warn and counsel you. I saw, or fancied I saw, in you a mind congenial to my own—a mind above the frivolities of your sex—a mind, in short, with the grasp and energy of a man's. You were then but a child; you are scarcely yet a woman; yet have I not given to your intellect the strong food on which the statesmen of Florence fed their pupil-princes; or the noble Jesuits, the noble men who were destined to extend the secret empire of the imperishable Loyola?"

"You gave me the taste for a knowledge rare in my sex, I own," answered Lucretia, with a slight tone of regret in her voice; "and in the knowledge you have communicated I felt a charm that, at times, seems to me to be only fatal. You have confounded in my mind evil and good, or, rather, you have left both good and evil as dead ashes, as the dust and cinder of a crucible. You have made intellect the only conscience. Of late, I wish that my tutor had been a village priest!"

"Of late since you have listened to the pastorals of that meek Corydon."

"Dare you despise him—and for what? that he is good and honest?"

"I despise him not because he is good and honest, but because he is of the common herd of men, without aim or character.

And it is for this youth that you will sacrifice your fortunes, your ambition, the station you were born to fill and have been reared to improve—this youth in whom there is nothing but the lap-dog's merit—sleekness and beauty. Ay, frown—the frown betrays you—you love him!"

"And if I do?" said Lucretia, raising her tall form to its utmost height, and haughtily facing her inquisitor—"and, if I do, what then? Is he unworthy of me? Converse with him, and you will find that the noble form conceals as high a spirit. He wants but wealth; I can give it to him. If his temper is gentle, I can prompt and guide it to fame and power. He, at least, has education, and eloquence, and mind. What has Mr. Vernon?"

"Mr. Vernon? I did not speak of him!"

Lucretia gazed hard upon the Provençal's countenance—gazed with that unpitying air of triumph with which a woman who detects a power over the heart she does not desire to conquer, exults in defeating the reasons that heart appears to her to prompt. "No," she said in a calm voice, to which the venom of secret irony gave stinging significance—"no, you spoke not of Mr. Vernon; you thought that if I looked round—if I looked nearer—I might have a fairer choice."

"You are cruel—you are unjust," said Dalibard, falteringly. "If I once presumed for a moment, have I repeated my offence? But," he added, hurriedly, "in me—much as you appear to despise me—in me, at least, you would have risked none of the dangers that beset you if you seriously set your heart on Mainwaring."

"You think my uncle would be proud to give my hand to Monsieur Olivier Dalibard?"

"I think and I know," answered the Provençal, gravely, and disregarding the taunt, "that if you had deigned to render me—poor exile that I am!—the most enviable of men, you had still been the heiress of Laughton."

"So you have said and urged," said Lucretia, with evident curiosity in her voice; "yet how, and by what art—wise and subtle as you are—could you have won my uncle's consent?"

"That is my secret," returned Dalibard, gloomily: "and since

the madness I indulged is for ever over—since I have so schooled my heart, that nothing, despite your sarcasm, save an affectionate interest which I may call paternal, rests there—let us pass from this painful subject. Oh, my dear pupil, be warned in time! know love for what it really is, in the dark and complicated history of actual life—a brief enchantment, not to be disdained, but not to be considered the all in all. Look round the world, contemplate all those who have married from passion—ten years afterwards, whither has the passion flown? With a few, indeed, where there is community of object and character, new excitements, new aims, and hopes, spring up; and, having first taken root in passion, the passion continues to shoot out in their fresh stems and fibres. But deceive yourself not; there is no such community between you and Mainwaring. What you call his goodness, you will learn hereafter to despise as feeble; and what in reality is your mental power he soon, too soon, will shudder at as unwomanly and hateful."

"Hold!" cried Lucretia, tremulously. "Hold! and if he does, I shall owe his hate to you—to your lessons—to your deadly influence!"

"Lucretia, no!—the seeds were in you! Can cultivation force from the soil that which it is against the nature of the soil to bear?"

"I will pluck out the weeds! I will transform myself!"

"Child, I defy you!" said the scholar, with a smile, that gave to his face the expression his son had conveyed to it. "I have warned you, and my task is done." With that he bowed, and leaving her, was soon by the side of Sir Miles St. John, and the baronet and his librarian, a few moments after, entered the house, and sat down to chess.

But during the dialogues we have sketched, we must not suppose that Sir Miles himself had been so wholly absorbed in the sensual gratification bestowed upon Europe by the immortal Raleigh, as to neglect his guest and kinsman.

"And so, Charley Vernon, it is not the fashion to smoke in Lunnon:" thus Sir Miles pronounced the word, according to the Euphuism of his youth, and which, even at that day, still lingered in courtly jargon.

"No, sir. However, to console us, we have most other vices in full force."

"I don't doubt it; they say the Prince's set exhaust life pretty quickly."

"It certainly requires the fortune of an earl and the constitution of a prize-fighter to live with him."

"Yet methinks, Master Charley, you have neither the one nor the other."

"And therefore I see before me, and at no very great distance, the Bench—and a consumption!" answered Vernon, suppressing a slight yawn.

"'Tis a pity; for you had a fine estate, properly managed; and in spite of your faults, you have the heart of a true gentleman. Come, come!"—and the old man spoke with tenderness—"you are young enough yet to reform. A prudent marriage and a good wife will save both your health and your acres."

"If you think so highly of marriage, my dear Sir Miles, it is a wonder you did not add to your precepts the value of your example."

"Jackanapes! I had not your infirmities! I never was a spendthrift, and I have a constitution of iron!" There was a pause. "Charles," continued Sir Miles, musingly, "there is many an earl with a less fortune than the conjoined estates of Vernon Grange and Laughton Hall. You must already have understood me—it is my intention to leave my estates to Lucretia—it is my wish, nevertheless, to think you will not be the worse for my will. Frankly, if you can like my niece, win her; settle here while I live, put the Grange to nurse, and recruit yourself by fresh air and field sports. Zounds, Charles, I love you, and that's the truth! Give me your hand!"

"And a grateful heart with it, sir," said Vernon, warmly, evidently affected, as he started from his indolent position, and took the hand extended to him. "Believe me, I do not covet your wealth, nor do I envy my cousin anything so much as the first place in your regard."

"Prettily said, my boy; and I don't suspect you of insincerity. What think you, then, of my plan?"

Mr. Vernon seemed embarrassed; but, recovering himself

with his usual ease, he replied, archly, "Perhaps, sir, it will be of little use to know what I think of your plan; my fair cousin may have upset it already."

"Ha, sir! let me look at you—so—so! you are not jesting. What the deuce do you mean? 'Gad, man, speak out!"

"Do you not think that Mr. Monderling—Mandolin—what's his name—eh?—do you not think that he is a very handsome young fellow?" said Mr. Vernon, drawing out his snuffbox, and offering it to his kinsman.

"Damn your snuff," quoth Sir Miles, in great choler, as he rejected the proffered courtesy with a vehemence that sent half the contents of the box upon the joint eyes and noses of the two canine favourites dozing at his feet. The setter started up in an agony—the spaniel wheezed and sniffled, and ran off, stopping every moment to take his head between his paws. The old gentleman continued, without heeding the sufferings of his dumb friends—a symptom of rare discomposure on his part:

"Do you mean to insinuate, Mr. Vernon, that my niece,—my elder niece, Lucretia Clavering—condescends to notice the looks, good or bad, of Mr. Mainwaring? 'Sdeath, sir, he is the son of a land-agent! Sir, he is intended for trade! Sir, his highest ambition is to be partner in some fifth-rate mercantile house!"

"My dear Sir Miles," replied Mr. Vernon, as he continued to brush away, with his scented handkerchief, such portions of the Prince's mixture as his nankeen inexpressibles had diverted from the sensual organs of Dash and Ponto—"my dear Sir Miles, *ça n'empêche pas le sentiment!*"

"*Empêche* the fiddlestick! You don't know Lucretia. There are many girls, indeed, who might not be trusted near any handsome flute-playing spark, with black eyes and white teeth; but Lucretia is not one of those; she has spirit and ambition that would never stoop to a *mésalliance;* she has the mind and will of a queen—old Queen Bess, I believe."

"That is saying much for her talent, sir; but if so, Heaven help her intended! I am duly grateful for the blessings you propose me!"

Despite his anger, the old gentleman could not help smiling.

"Why, to confess the truth, she is hard to manage; but we

men of the world know how to govern women, I hope—much more how to break in a girl scarce out of her teens. As for this fancy of yours, it is sheer folly—Lucretia knows my mind. She has seen her mother's fate; she has seen her sister an exile from my house—why? for no fault of hers, poor thing! but because she is the child of disgrace, and the mother's sin is visited on her daughter's head. I am a good-natured man, I fancy, as men go; but I am old-fashioned enough to care for my race. If Lucretia demeaned herself to love, to encourage, that lad—why, I would strike her from my will, and put your name where I have placed hers."

"Sir," said Vernon, gravely, and throwing aside all affectation of manner, "this becomes serious; and I have no right even to whisper a doubt by which it now seems I might benefit. I think it imprudent, if you wish Miss Clavering to regard me impartially as a suitor to her hand, to throw her, at her age, in the way of a man far superior to myself, and to most men, in personal advantages—a man more of her own years, well educated, well mannered, with no evidence of his inferior birth in his appearance or his breeding. I have not the least ground for supposing that he has made the slightest impression on Miss Clavering, and if he has, it would be, perhaps, but a girl's innocent and thoughtless fancy, easily shaken off by time and worldly reflection: but pardon me, if I say bluntly, that should that be so, you would be wholly unjustified in punishing, even in blaming her—it is yourself you must blame for your own carelessness, and that forgetful blindness to human nature and youthful emotions, which, I must say, is the less pardonable in one who has known the world so intimately."

"Charles Vernon," said the old baronet, "give me your hand again! I was right, at least, when I said you had the heart of a true gentleman. Drop this subject for the present. Who has just left Lucretia yonder?"

"Your *protégé*—the Frenchman."

"Ah, *he*, at least, is not blind—go and join Lucretia!"

Vernon bowed, emptied the remains of the Madeira into a tumbler, drank the contents at a draught, and sauntered towards

Lucretia; but she, perceiving his approach, crossed abruptly into one of the alleys that led to the other side of the house; and he was either too indifferent, or too well-bred, to force upon her the companionship which she so evidently shunned. He threw himself at length upon one of the benches on the lawn, and leaning his head upon his hand, fell into reflections, which, had he spoken, would have shaped themselves somewhat thus into words:—

"If I must take that girl as the price of this fair heritage, shall I gain or lose? I grant that she has the finest neck and shoulders I ever saw out of marble; but far from being in love with her, she gives me a feeling like fear and aversion. Add to this, that she has evidently no kinder sentiment for me than I for her; and if she once had a heart, that young gentleman has long since coaxed it away. Pleasant auspices, these, for matrimony, to a poor invalid, who wishes at least to decline and to die in peace! Moreover, if I were rich enough to marry as I pleased—if I were what, perhaps, I ought to be, heir to Laughton—why, there is a certain sweet Mary in the world, whose eyes are softer than Lucretia Clavering's—but that is a dream! On the other hand, if I do not win this girl, and my poor kinsman give her all or nearly all his possessions, Vernon Grange goes to the usurers, and the king will find a lodging for myself. What does it matter? I cannot live above two or three years at the most, and can only hope, therefore, that dear stout old Sir Miles may outlive me. At thirty-three I have worn out fortune and life; little pleasure could Laughton give me; brief pain the Bench. 'Fore Gad, the philosophy of the thing is on the whole against sour looks and the noose!" Thus deciding in the progress of his reverie, he smiled, and changed his position. The sun had set—the twilight was over—the moon rose in splendour from amidst a thick copse of mingled beech and oak; the beams fell full on the face of the muser, and the face seemed yet paler; and the exhaustion of premature decay yet more evident, by that still and melancholy light—all ruins gain dignity by the moon. This was a ruin nobler than that which painters place on their canvass—the ruin, not of stone and brick, but of humanity and spirit; the wreck of man

prematurely old, not stricken by great sorrow, not bowed by great toil, but fretted and mined away by small pleasures and poor excitements—small and poor, but daily, hourly, momently at their gnome-like work. Something of the gravity and the true lesson of the hour and scene, perhaps, forced itself upon a mind little given to sentiment, for Vernon rose languidly, and muttered—

"My poor mother hoped better things from me. It is well, after all, that it is broken off with Mary! Why should there be any one to weep for me? I can the better die smiling as I have lived."

Meanwhile, as it is necessary we should follow each of the principal characters we have introduced through the course of an evening more or less eventful in the destiny of all, we return to Mainwaring, and accompany him to the lake at the bottom of the park, which he reached as its smooth surface glistened in the last beams of the sun. He saw, as he neared the water, the fish sporting in the pellucid tide: the dragon-fly darted and hovered in the air; the tedded grass beneath his feet, gave forth the fragrance of crushed thyme and clover; the swan paused, as if slumbering on the wave; the linnet and finch sang still from the neighbouring copses; and the heavy bees were winging their way home with a drowsy murmur; all around were images of that unspeakable peace which Nature whispers to those atuned to her music; all fitted to lull, but not to deject the spirit; images dear to the holiday of the world-worn man; to the contemplation of serene and retired age; to the boyhood of poets; to the youth of lovers. But Mainwaring's step was heavy, and his brow clouded; and Nature that evening was dumb to him. At the margin of the lake stood a solitary angler who now (his evening's task done) was employed in leisurely disjointing his rod and whistling with much sweetness an air from one of Isaak Walton's songs. Mainwaring reached the angler, and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"What sport, Ardworth?"

"A few large roach with the fly, and one pike with a gudgeon —a noble fellow!—look at him! He was lying under the reeds yonder; I saw his green back, and teased him into biting

A heavenly evening! I wonder you did not follow my example, and escape from a set where neither you nor I can feel very much at home, to this green banquet of Nature, in which at least no man sits below the salt-cellar. The birds are an older family than the St. Johns, but they don't throw their pedigree in our teeth, Mainwaring."

"Nay, nay, my good friend, you wrong old Sir Miles; proud he is, no doubt, but neither you nor I have had to complain of his insolence."

"Of his insolence! certainly not,—of his condescension, yes! Hang it, William, it is his very politeness that galls me. Don't you observe that with Vernon, or Lord A——, or Lord B——, or Mr. C——, he is easy and off-hand, calls them by their names, pats them on the shoulder, rates them, and swears at them if they vex him; but with you, and me, and his French parasite, it is all stately decorum and punctilious courtesy:—'Mr. Mainwaring, I am delighted to see you;' 'Mr. Ardworth, as you are so near, dare I ask you to ring the bell?' 'Mons. Dalibard, with the utmost deference, I venture to disagree with you.' However, don't let my foolish susceptibility ruffle your pride. And you, too, have a worthy object in view, which might well detain you from roach and jack-fish. Have you stolen your interview with the superb Lucretia?"

"Yes, stolen, as you say; and, like all thieves not thoroughly hardened, I am ashamed of my gains."

"Sit down, my boy; this is a bank in ten thousand; there—that old root to lean your elbow on, this soft moss for your cushion; sit down and confess. You have something on your mind that preys on you; we are old college friends—out with it!"

"There is no resisting you, Ardworth," said Mainwaring, smiling, and drawn from his reserve and his gloom by the frank good-humour of his companion; "I should like, I own, to make a clean breast of it; and perhaps I may profit by your advice You know, in the first place that after I left college, my father seeing me indisposed for the Church, to which he had always destined me in his own heart, and for which, indeed, he had gone out of his way to maintain me at the University, gave me

the choice of his own business as a surveyor and land-agent, or of entering into the mercantile profession. I chose the latter, and went to Southampton, where we have a relation in business to be initiated into the elementary mysteries. There I became acquainted with a good clergyman and his wife, and in that house I passed a great part of my time."

"With the hope, I trust, on better consideration, of gratifying your father's ambition, and learning how to starve with gentility on a cure."

"Not much of that, I fear."

"Then, the clergyman had a daughter?"

"You are nearer the mark now," said Mainwaring, colouring; "though it was not his daughter; a young lady lived in his family not even related to him; she was placed there with a certain allowance by a rich relation. In a word, I admired, perhaps I loved this young person; but she was without an independence, and I not yet provided even with the substitute of money—a profession. I fancied (do not laugh at my vanity) that my feelings might be returned. I was in alarm for her as well as myself; I sounded the clergyman as to the chance of obtaining the consent of her rich relation, and was informed that he thought it hopeless. I felt I had no right to invite her to poverty and ruin, and still less to entangle further (if I had chanced to touch at all) her affection. I made an excuse to my father to leave the town, and returned home."

"Prudent and honourable enough, so far; unlike me, I should have run off with the girl, if she loved me, and old Plutus, the rascal, might have done his worst against Cupid. But I interrupt you."

"I came back when the county was greatly agitated; public meetings, speeches, mobs—a sharp election going on. My father had always taken keen interest in politics; he was of the same party as Sir Miles, who you know is red-hot upon politics. I was easily led—partly by ambition partly by the effect of example, partly by the hope to give a new turn to my thoughts—to make an appearance in public."

"And a devilish creditable one, too! Why, man, your speeches

have been quoted with rapture by the London papers. Horribly aristocratic and Pittish, it is true;—I think differently; but every man to his taste. Well——"

"My attempts, such as they were, procured me the favour of Sir Miles. He had long been acquainted with my father, who had helped him in his own elections years ago. He seemed cordially delighted to patronise the son: he invited me to visit him at Laughton, and hinted to my father that I was formed for something better than a counting-house: my poor father was intoxicated. In a word, here I am—here, often for days, almost weeks, together, have I been a guest, always welcomed."

"You pause. This is the primordium,—now comes the confession, eh?"

"Why, one half the confession is over. It was my most unmerited fortune to attract the notice of Miss Clavering. Do not fancy me so self-conceited as to imagine that I should ever have presumed so high, but for——"

"But for encouragement—I understand! Well, she is a magnificent creature in her way; and I do not wonder that she drove the poor little girl at Southampton out of your thoughts."

"Ah! but there is the sore—I am not sure that she has done so. Ardworth, I may trust you?"

"With everything but half-a-guinea. I would not promise to be rock against so great a temptation!" and Ardworth turned his empty pockets inside out.

"Tush—be serious!—or I go."

"Serious! With pockets like these, the devil's in it if I am not serious. *Perge, precor.*"

"Ardworth, then," said Mainwaring, with great emotion, "I confide to you the secret trouble of my heart. This girl at Southampton is Lucretia's sister—her half-sister: the rich relation on whose allowance she lives is Sir Miles St. John."

"Whew!—my own poor dear little cousin, by the father's side! Mainwaring, I trust you have not deceived me; you have not amused yourself with breaking Susan's heart?—for a heart, and an honest, simple, English girl's heart she has."

"Heaven forbid!—I tell you I have never even declared my love—and if love it were, I trust it is over. But when Sir Miles was first kind to me, first invited me, I own I had the hope to win his esteem, and since he had always made so strong and cruel a distinction between Lucretia and Susan, I thought it not impossible that he might consent at last to my union with the niece he had refused to receive and acknowledge. But even while the hope was in me, I was drawn on—I was entangled—I was spell-bound—I know not how or why; but, to close my confidence, while still doubtful whether my own heart is free from the remembrance of the one sister, I am pledged to the other."

Ardworth looked down gravely and remained silent. He was a joyous, careless, reckless youth, with unsteady character and pursuits—and with something of vague poetry, much of unaccommodating pride about his nature—one of those youths little likely to do what is called well in the world—not persevering enough for an independent career—too blunt and honest for a servile one. But it was in the very disposition of such a person to judge somewhat harshly of Mainwaring's disclosure, and not easily to comprehend what, after all, was very natural—how a young man, new to life, timid by character, and of an extreme susceptibility to the fear of giving pain, had, in the surprise, the gratitude, the emotion, of an avowed attachment from a girl, far above him in worldly position, been forced by receiving, to seem, at least, to return her affection. And, indeed, though not wholly insensible to the brilliant prospects opened to him in such a connection, yet, to do him justice, Mainwaring would have been equally entangled by a similar avowal from a girl more his equal in the world. It was rather from an amiability bordering upon weakness, than from any more degrading moral imperfections, that he had been betrayed into a position which neither contented his heart, nor satisfied his conscience.

With far less ability than his friend, Ardworth had more force and steadiness in his nature, and was wholly free from that morbid delicacy of temperament to which susceptible and shy persons owe much of their errors and misfortunes.

He said, therefore, after a long pause, "My good fellow, to be plain with you, I cannot say that your confession has improved you in my estimation; but that is perhaps because of the bluntness of my understanding. I could quite comprehend your forgetting Susan (and, after all, I am left in doubt as to the extent of her conquest over you) for the very different charms of her sister. On the other hand, I could still better understand, that having once fancied Susan, you could not be commanded into love for Lucretia. But I do not comprehend your feeling love for one, and making love to the other—which is the long and short of the business."

"That is not exactly the true statement," answered Mainwaring, with a powerful effort at composure. "There are moments when listening to Lucretia, when charmed by that softness which, contrasting the rest of her character, she exhibits to none but me, struck by her great mental powers, proud of an unsought triumph over such a being, I feel as if I could love none but her; then, suddenly, her mood changes—she utters sentiments that chill and revolt me—the very beauty seems vanished from her face. I recall, with a sigh, the simple sweetness of Susan, and I feel as if I deceived both my mistress and myself. Perhaps, however, all the circumstances of this connection tend to increase my doubts. It is humiliating to me to know that I woo clandestinely and upon sufferance—that I am stealing, as it were, into a fortune—that I am eating Sir Miles's bread, and yet counting upon his death; and this shame in myself may make me unconsciously unjust to Lucretia. But it is useless to reprove me for what is past; and though I at first imagined you could advise me for the future, I now see, too clearly, that no advice could avail."

"I grant that, too—for all you require is to make up your mind to be fairly off with the old love, or fairly on with the new. However, now you have stated your case thus frankly, if you permit me, I will take advantage of the strange chance of finding myself here, and watch, ponder, and counsel, if I can. This Lucretia, I own it, puzzles and perplexes me; but, though no Œdipus, I will not take fright at the sphinx. I suppose now it is time to return. They expect some of

the neighbours to drink tea, and I must doff my fishing-jacket. Come!"

As they strolled towards the house, Ardworth broke a silence which had lasted for some moments:

"And how is that dear good Fielden? I ought to have guessed him at once, when you spoke of your clergyman and his young charge: but I did not know he was at Southampton."

"He has exchanged his living for a year, on account of his wife's health, and rather, I think also, with the wish to bring poor Susan nearer to Laughton, in the chance of her uncle seeing her. But you are, then, acquainted with Fielden?"

"Acquainted!—my best friend. He was my tutor, and prepared me for Caius College. I owe him, not only the little learning I have, but the little good that is left in me. I owe to him apparently, also, whatever chance of bettering my prospects may arise from my visit to Laughton."

"Notwithstanding our intimacy, we have, like most young men not related, spoken so little of our family matters, that I do not now understand how you are cousin to Susan; nor what, to my surprise and delight, brought you hither three days ago."

"Faith, my story is easier to explain than your own, William! Here goes!"

But as Ardworth's recital partially involves references to family matters, not yet sufficiently known to the reader, we must be pardoned if we assume to ourselves his task of narrator, and necessarily enlarge on his details.

The branch of the illustrious family of St. John, represented by Sir Miles, diverged from the parent stem of the Lords of Bletshoe. With them it placed at the summit of its pedigree the name of William de St. John, the Conqueror's favourite and trusted warrior, and Oliva de Filgiers. With them it blazoned the latter alliance, which gave to Sir Oliver St. John the lands of Bletshoe by the hand of Margaret Beauchamp (by her second marriage with the Duke of Somerset), grandmother to Henry VII. In the following generation, the younger son of a younger son had founded, partly by offices of state, partly by marriage with a wealthy heiress, a house of his own; and in the reign of James the First, the St. Johns of Laughton ranked amongst the chief

gentlemen of Hampshire. From that time till the accession of George III. the family, though it remained untitled, had added to its consequence by intermarriages of considerable dignity, chosen, indeed, with a disregard for money uncommon amongst the English aristocracy, so that the estate was but little enlarged since the reign of James, though profiting, of course, by improved cultivation and the different value of money. On the other hand, perhaps there were scarcely ten families in the country who could boast of a similar directness of descent on all sides, from the proudest and noblest aristocracy of the soil; and Sir Miles St. John, by blood, was, almost at the distance of eight centuries, as pure a Norman as his ancestral William. His grandfather, nevertheless, had deviated from the usual disinterested practice of the family, and had married an heiress, who brought the quarterings of Vernon to the crowded escutcheon, and with these quarterings an estate of some 4000*l.* a year, popularly known by the name of Vernon Grange. This rare occurrence did not add to the domestic happiness of the contracting parties, nor did it lead to the ultimate increase of the Laughton possessions. Two sons were born. To the elder was destined the father's inheritance—to the younger the maternal property. One house is not large enough for two heirs. Nothing could exceed the pride of the father as a St. John, except the pride of the mother as a Vernon. Jealousies between the two sons began early and rankled deep; nor was there peace at Laughton till the younger had carried away from its rental the lands of Vernon Grange; and the elder remained just where his predecessors stood in point of possessions—sole lord of Laughton sole. The elder son, Sir Miles's father, had been, indeed, so chafed by the rivalry with his brother that in disgust he had run away, and thrown himself, at the age of fourteen, into the navy. By accident or by merit he rose high in that profession, acquired name and fame, and lost an eye and an arm,—for which he was gazetted, at the same time, an admiral and a baronet.

Thus mutilated and dignified, Sir George St. John retired from the profession; and finding himself unmarried, and haunted by the apprehension that if he died childless, Laughton would pass to his brother's heirs, he resolved upon consigning his remains

to the nuptial couch, previous to the surer peace of the family vault. At the age of fifty-nine, the grim veteran succeeded in finding a young lady of unblemished descent, and much marked with the small-pox, who consented to accept the only hand which Sir George had to offer. From this marriage sprang a numerous family; but all died in early childhood, frightened to death, said the neighbours, by their tender parents (considered the ugliest couple in the county), except one boy (the present Sir Miles) and one daughter, many years younger, destined to become Lucretia's mother. Sir Miles came early into his property; and although the softening advance of civilisation, with the liberal effects of travel, and a long residence in cities, took from him that provincial austerity of pride, which is only seen in stanch perfection amongst the lords of a village, he was yet little less susceptible to the duties of maintaining his lineage pure as its representation had descended to him, than the most superb of his predecessors. But owing, it was said, to an early disappointment, he led, during youth and manhood, a roving and desultory life, and so put off from year to year the grand experiment matrimonial, until he arrived at old age, with the philosophical determination to select from the other branches of his house the successor to the heritage of St. John. In thus arrogating to himself a right to neglect his proper duties as head of a family, he found his excuse in adopting his niece Lucretia. His sister had chosen for her first husband a friend and neighbour of his own, a younger son, of unexceptionable birth, and of very agreeable manners in society. But this gentleman contrived to render her life so miserable, that, though he died fifteen months after their marriage, his widow could scarcely be expected to mourn long for him. A year after Mr. Clavering's death, Mrs. Clavering married again, under the mistaken notion that she had the right to choose for herself. She married Dr. Mivers, the provincial physician, who had attended her husband in his last illness—a gentleman by education, manners, and profession, but unhappily the son of a silk-mercer. Sir Miles never forgave this connection. By her first marriage, Sir Miles's sister had one daughter, Lucretia; by her second marriage, another daughter, named Susan. She survived

somewhat more than a year the birth of the latter : on her death, Sir Miles formally (through his agent) applied to Dr. Mivers for his eldest niece, Lucretia Clavering, and the physician did not think himself justified in withholding from her the probable advantages of a transfer from his own roof to that of her wealthy uncle. He himself had been no worldly gainer by his connection ; his practice had suffered materially from the sympathy which was felt by the county families for the supposed wrongs of Sir Miles St. John who was personally not only popular, but esteemed, nor less so on account of his pride : too dignified to refer even to his domestic annoyances, except to his most familiar associates—to them, indeed, Sir Miles had said briefly, that he considered a physician who abused his entrance into a noble family by stealing into its alliance, was a character in whose punishment all society had an interest. The words were repeated ; they were thought just. Those who ventured to suggest that Mrs. Clavering, as a widow, was a free agent, were regarded with suspicion. It was the time when French principles were just beginning to be held in horror, especially in the provinces, and when everything that encroached upon the rights and prejudices of the high-born was called "a French principle." Dr. Mivers was as much scouted as if he had been a *sans-culotte.* Obliged to quit the county, he settled at a distance; but he had a career to commence again; his wife's death enfeebled his spirits, and damped his exertions. He did little more than earn a bare subsistence, and died at last, when his only daughter was fourteen, poor and embarrassed. On his death-bed he wrote a letter to Sir Miles, reminding him that, after all, Susan was his sister's child, gently vindicating himself from the unmerited charge of treachery which had blasted his fortunes, and left his orphan penniless ; and closing with a touching yet a manly appeal to the sole relative left to befriend her. The clergyman who had attended him in his dying moments took charge of this letter; he brought it in person to Laughton, and delivered it to Sir Miles. Whatever his errors, the old baronet was no common man. He was not vindictive, though he could not be called forgiving. He had considered his conduct to his sister a duty owed to his name

and ancestors; she had placed herself and her youngest child out of the pale of his family. He would not receive as his niece the granddaughter of a silk-mercer. The relationship was extinct, as, in certain countries, nobility is forfeited by a union with an inferior class. But, niece or not, here was a claim to humanity and benevolence; and never yet had appeal been made by suffering to his heart and purse in vain.

He bowed his head over the letter as his eye came to the last line, and remained silent so long, that the clergyman, at last, moved and hopeful, approached and took his hand. It was the impulse of a good man and a good priest. Sir Miles looked up in surprise; but the calm, pitying face bent on him repelled all return of pride.

"Sir," he said, tremulously, and he pressed the hand that grasped his own, "I thank you. I am not fit at this moment to decide what to do: to-morrow you shall know. And the man died poor? not in want, not in want?"

"Comfort yourself, worthy sir; he had, at the last, all that sickness and death require, except one assurance, which I ventured to whisper to him—I trust not too rashly—that his daughter would not be left unprotected. And I pray you to reflect, my dear sir, that——"

Sir Miles did not wait for the conclusion of the sentence; he rose abruptly, and left the room. Mr. Fielden (so the good priest was named) felt confident of the success of his mission; but, to win it the more support, he sought Lucretia. She was then seventeen: it is an age when the heart is peculiarly open to the household ties—to the memory of a mother—to the sweet name of sister. He sought this girl, he told his tale, and pleaded the sister's cause. Lucretia heard in silence; neither eye nor lip betrayed emotion; but her colour went and came. This was the only sign that she was moved: moved, but how? Fielden's experience in the human heart could not guess. When he had done, she went quietly to her desk (it was in her own room that the conference took place)—she unlocked it with a deliberate hand—she took from it a pocket-book and a case of jewels, which Sir Miles

had given her on her last birthday. "Let my sister have these—while I live she shall not want!"

"My dear young lady, it is not these things that she asks from you; it is your affection, your sisterly heart, your intercession with her natural protector; these, in her name, I ask for—*non gemmis, neque purpurâ venale, nec auro!*"

Lucretia then, still without apparent emotion, raised to the good man's face deep, penetrating, but unrevealing eyes, and said slowly:—

"Is my sister like my mother, who, they say, was handsome?"

Much startled by this question, Fielden answered—"I never saw your mother, my dear; but your sister gives promise of more than common comeliness."

Lucretia's brows grew slightly compressed. "And her education has been, of course, neglected?"

"Certainly, in some points—mathematics, for instance, and theology. But she knows what ladies generally know—French and Italian, and such like. Dr. Mivers was not unlearned in the polite letters. Oh, trust me, my dear young lady, she will not disgrace your family; she will justify your uncle's favour. Plead for her!"—and the good man clasped his hands.

Lucretia's eyes fell musingly on the ground; but she resumed, after a short pause.

"What does my uncle himself say?"

"Only that he will decide to-morrow."

"I will see him;" and Lucretia left the room as for that object. But when she had gained the stairs, she paused at the large embayed casement, which formed a niche in the landing-place, and gazed over the broad domains beyond; a stern smile settled, then, upon her lips; the smile seemed to say—"In this inheritance I will have no rival."

Lucretia's influence with Sir Miles was great; but here it was not needed. Before she saw him he had decided on his course. Her precocious and apparently intuitive knowledge of character detected at a glance the safety with which she might intercede. She did so, and was chid into silence.

The next morning, Sir Miles took the priest's arm, and walked with him into the gardens.

"Mr. Fielden," he said, with the air of a man who has chosen his course, and deprecates all attempt to make him swerve from it, "if I followed my own selfish wishes, I should take home this poor child. Stay, sir, and hear me—I am no hypocrite, and I speak honestly—I like young faces—I have no family of my own;—I love Lucretia, and I am proud of her, but a girl brought up in adversity might be a better nurse and a more docile companion—let that pass. I have reflected and I feel that I cannot set to Lucretia—set to children unborn the example of indifference to a name degraded and a race adulterated: you may call this pride or prejudice—I view it differently. There are duties due from an individual, duties due from a nation, duties due from a family; as my ancestors thought, so think I. They left me the charge of their name, as the fief-rent by which I hold their lands. 'Sdeath, sir!—pardon me the expletive—I was about to say, that if I am now a childless old man, it is because I have myself known temptation, and resisted. I loved, and denied myself what I believed my best chance of happiness, because the object of my attachment was not my equal—that was a bitter struggle—I triumphed, and I rejoice at it, though the result was to leave all thoughts of wedlock elsewhere odious and repugnant. These principles of action have made a part of my creed as gentleman, if not as Christian—now to the point. I beseech you to find a fitting and reputable home for Miss—Miss Mivers (the lip slightly curled as the name was said)—I shall provide suitably for her maintenance. When she marries I will dower her, provided only and always, that her choice fall upon one who will not still further degrade her lineage on her mother's side, in a word, if she select a *gentleman*. Mr. Fielden, on this subject I have no more to say."

In vain the good clergyman—whose very conscience, as well as reason, was shocked by the deliberate and argumentative manner with which the baronet had treated the abandonment of his sister's child as an absolutely moral, almost religious duty

—in vain he exerted himself to repel such sophisms, and put the matter in its true light. It was easy for him to move Sir Miles's heart—*that* was ever gentle—*that* was moved already; but the crotchet in his head was impregnable. The more touchingly he painted poor Susan's unfriended youth, her sweet character, and promising virtues, the more Sir Miles St. John considered himself a martyr to his principles, and the more obstinate in the martyrdom he became. "Poor thing! poor child!" he said often, and brushed a tear from his eyes; "a thousand pities! Well, well, I hope she will be happy! Mind, money shall never stand in the way if she have a suitable offer!"

This was all the worthy clergyman, after an hour's eloquence, could extract from him. Out of breath, and out of patience, he gave in at last; and the baronet, still holding his reluctant arm, led him back towards the house. After a prolonged pause Sir Miles said abruptly: "I have been thinking that I may have unwittingly injured this man—this Mivers—while I deemed only that he injured me. As to reparation to his daughter, that is settled; and after all, though I do not publicly acknowledge her, she is half my own niece."

"Half?"

"Half—the father's side don't count, of course; and, rigidly speaking, the relationship is, perhaps, forfeited on the other. However, that half of it I grant. Zooks, Sir, I say I grant it!—I beg you ten thousand pardon for my vehemence. To return, perhaps I can show at least that I bear no malice to this poor doctor. He has relations of his own—silk-mercers—trade has reverses. How are they off?"

Perfectly perplexed by this very contradictory and paradoxical, yet, to one better acquainted with Sir Miles, very characteristic benevolence, Fielden was some time before he answered. "Those members of Dr. Mivers's family who are in trade are sufficiently prosperous; they have paid his debts; *they*, Sir Miles, will receive his daughter."

"By no means!" cried Sir Miles, quickly; then recovering himself, he added, "or, if you think that advisable, of course all interference on my part is withdrawn."

"*Festina lente!*—not so quick, Sir Miles. I do not yet say

that it is advisable—not because they are silk-mercers, the which, I humbly conceive, is no sin to exclude them from gratitude for their proffered kindness, but because Susan, poor child! having been brought up in different habits may feel a little strange, at least at first, with——"

"Strange, yes; I should hope so!" interrupted Sir Miles, taking snuff with much energy; "and, by the way, I am thinking that it would be well if you and Mrs. Fielden—you are married, sir?—that is right—clergymen all marry!—if you and Mrs. Fielden would take charge of her yourselves, it would be a great comfort to me to think her so well placed. We differ, sir—but I respect you. Think of this. Well, then, the doctor has left no relations that I can aid in any way."

"Strange man!" muttered Fielden. "Yes; I must not let one poor youth lose the opportunity offered by your—your——"

"Never mind what—proceed—one poor youth; in the shop, of course?"

"No; and by his father's side (since you so esteem such vanities) of an ancient family—a sister of Dr. Mivers married Captain Ardworth."

"Ardworth—a goodish name—Ardworth, of Yorkshire?"

"Yes, of that family. It was, of course, an imprudent marriage, contracted while he was only an ensign. His family did not reject him, Sir Miles."

"Sir, Ardworth is a good squire's family, but the name is Saxon; there is no difference in race between the head of the Ardworths, if he were a duke, and my gardener, John Hodge—Saxon and Saxon, both. *His* family did not reject him—go on."

"But he was a younger son in a large family—both himself and his wife have known all the distresses common, they tell me, to the poverty of a soldier, who has no resource but his pay. They have a son; Dr. Mivers—though so poor himself—took this boy, for he loved his sister dearly, and meant to bring him up to his own profession. Death frustrated this intention. The boy is high-spirited and deserving."

"Let his education be completed—send him to the university; and I will see that he is put into some career, of which his father's family would approve. You need not mention to any one my

intentions in this respect, not even to the lad. And now, Mr. Fielden, I have done my duty—at least, I think so. The longer you honour my house, the more I shall be pleased and grateful; but this topic, allow me most respectfully to say, needs and bears no further comment. Have you seen the last news from the army?"

"The army!—oh, fie, Sir Miles, I must speak one word more—may not my poor Susan have, at least, the comfort to embrace her sister?"

Sir Miles paused a moment, and struck his crutch-stick thrice firmly on the ground.

"I see no great objection to that; but, by the address of this letter, the poor girl is too far from Laughton to send Lucretia to her."

"I can obviate that objection, Sir Miles. It is my wish to continue to Susan her present home amongst my own children—my wife loves her dearly; and had you consented to give her the shelter of your own roof, I am sure I should not have seen a smile in the house for a month after. If you permit this plan, as indeed you honoured me by suggesting it, I can pass through Southampton on my way to my own living in Devonshire, and Miss Clavering can visit her sister there."

"Let it be so," said Sir Miles, briefly; and so the conversation closed.

Some weeks afterwards, Lucretia went in her uncle's carriage, with four post-horses, with her maid and her footman—went in the state and pomp of heiress to Laughton—to the small lodging-house in which the kind pastor crowded his children and his young guest. She stayed there some days. She did not weep when she embraced Susan—she did not weep when she took leave of her; but she showed no want of actual kindness, though the kindness was formal and stately. On her return, Sir Miles forbore to question; but he looked as if he expected, and would willingly permit, her to speak on what might naturally be uppermost at her heart. Lucretia, however, remained silent, till at last the baronet colouring, as if ashamed of his curiosity, said—

"Is your sister like your mother?"

"You forget, sir, I can have no recollection of my mother."

"Your mother had a strong family likeness to myself."

"She is not like you—they say she is like Dr. Mivers."

"Oh!" said the baronet, and he asked no more. The sisters did not meet again: a few letters passed between them, but the correspondence gradually ceased.

Young Ardworth went to college, prepared by Mr. Fielden, who was no ordinary scholar, and an accurate and profound mathematician — a more important requisite than classical learning in a tutor for Cambridge. But Ardworth was idle, and perhaps even dissipated. He took a common degree, and made some debts, which were paid by Sir Miles without a murmur. A few letters then passed between the baronet and the clergyman, as to Ardworth's future destiny; the latter owned that his pupil was not persevering enough for the bar, nor steady enough for the Church. These were no great faults in Sir Miles's eyes. He resolved, after an effort, to judge himself of the capacities of the young man, and so came the invitation to Laughton. Ardworth was greatly surprised when Fielden communicated to him this invitation, for hitherto he had not conceived the slightest suspicion of his benefactor—he had rather, and naturally, supposed that some relation of his father's had paid for his maintenance at the university; and he knew enough of the family history to look upon Sir Miles as the proudest of men. How was it, then, that he who would not receive the daughter of Dr. Mivers, his own niece, would invite the nephew of Dr. Mivers, who was no relation to him? However, his curiosity was excited, and Fielden was urgent that he should go;—to Laughton, therefore, had he gone.

We have now brought down to the opening of our narrative the general records of the family it concerns; we have reserved our account of the rearing and the character of the personage most important perhaps in the development of its events—Lucretia Clavering; in order to place singly before the reader the portrait of her dark, misguided, and ill-boding youth.

CHAPTER II.

LUCRETIA.

WHEN Lucretia first came to the house of Sir Miles St. John, she was an infant about four years old. The baronet then lived principally in London, with occasional visits rather to the Continent or a watering-place than to his own family mansion. He did not pay any minute attention to his little ward—satisfied that her nurse was sedulous, and her nursery airy and commodious. When at the age of seven, she began to interest him, and he himself, approaching old age, began seriously to consider whether he should select her as his heiress, for hitherto he had not formed any decided or definite notions on the matter—he was startled by a temper so vehement, so self-willed and sternly imperious, so obstinately bent upon attaining its object, so indifferently contemptuous of warning, reproof, coaxing, or punishment, that her governess honestly came to him in despair.

The management of this unmanageable child interested Sir Miles. It caused him to think of Lucretia seriously; it caused him to have her much in his society, and always in his thoughts; the result was, that by amusing and occupying him, she forced a stronger hold on his affections than she might have done had she been more like the ordinary run of commonplace children. Of all dogs, there is no dog that so attaches a master as a dog that snarls at everybody else,—that no other hand can venture to pat with impunity; of all horses, there is none which so flatters the rider, from Alexander downwards, as a horse that nobody else can ride. Extend this principle to the human species, and you may understand why Lucretia became so dear to Sir Miles St. John—she got at his heart through his vanity. For though, at times, her brow darkened, and her eye flashed even at his remonstrance, she was yet no sooner in his society than she made a marked distinction between him and the subordinates who had hitherto sought to control her. Was this affection?

—he thought so. Alas! what parent can trace the workings of a child's mind—springs moved by an idle word from a nurse—a whispered conference between hirelings! Was it possible that Lucretia had not often been menaced, as the direst evil that could befall her, with her uncle's displeasure; that long before she could be sensible of mere worldly loss or profit, she was not impressed with a vague sense of Sir Miles's power over her fate; nay, when trampling, in childish wrath and scorn, upon some menial's irritable feelings, was it possible that she had not been told that, but for Sir Miles, she would be little better than a servant herself? Be this as it may, all weakness is prone to dissimulate; and rare and happy is the child whose feelings are as pure and transparent as the fond parent deems them. There is something in children, too, which seems like an instinctive deference to the aristocratic appearances which sway the world. Sir Miles's stately person—his imposing dress, the respect with which he was surrounded—all tended to beget notions of superiority and power, to which it was no shame to succumb, as it was to Miss Black, the governess, whom the maids answered pertly, or Martha, the nurse, whom Miss Black snubbed if Lucretia tore her frock.

Sir Miles's affection once won—his penetration not perhaps blinded to her more evident faults, but his self-love soothed towards regarding them leniently—there was much in Lucretia's external gifts which justified the predilection of the haughty man. As a child, she was beautiful, and, perhaps, from her very imperfections of temper, her beauty had that air of distinction which the love of command is apt to confer. If Sir Miles was with his friends when Lucretia swept into the room, he was pleased to hear them call her their little "princess," and was pleased yet more at a certain dignified tranquillity with which she received their caresses or their toys, and which he regarded as the sign of a superior mind: nor was it long, indeed, before what we call a superior mind developed itself in the young Lucretia. All children are quick till they are set methodically to study; but Lucretia's quickness defied even that numbing ordeal, by which half of us are rendered dunces. Rapidity and precision in all the

tasks set to her,—in the comprehension of all the explanations given to her questions, evinced singular powers of readiness and reasoning.

As she grew older, she became more reserved and thoughtful. Seeing but few children of her own age, and mixing intimately with none, her mind was debarred from the usual objects which distract the vivacity, the restless and wondrous observation, of childhood. She came in and out of Sir Miles's library of a morning, or his drawing-room of an evening, till her hour for rest, with unquestioned and sometimes unnoticed freedom; she listened to the conversation around her, and formed her own conclusions unchecked. It has a great influence upon a child, whether for good or for evil, to mix early and habitually with those grown up—for good to the mere intellect always—the evil depends upon the character and discretion of those the child sees and hears—"Reverence the greatest is due to the children," exclaims the wisest of the Romans;[1] that is to say, that we must revere the candour and inexperience and innocence of their minds.

Now Sir Miles's habitual associates were persons of the world; well-bred and decorous, indeed, before children, as the best of the old school were — avoiding all anecdotes, all allusions, for which the prudent matron would send her girls out of the room; but with that reserve, speaking of the world as the world goes: if talking of young A——, calculating carelessly what he would have when old A——, his father, died — naturally giving to wealth, and station, and ability, their fixed importance in life—not over-apt to single out for eulogium some quiet goodness, rather inclined to speak with irony of pretensions to virtue—rarely speaking but with respect of the worldly seemings which rule mankind;—all these had their inevitable effect upon that keen, quick, yet moody and reflective intellect.

Sir Miles removed at last to Laughton. He gave up London —why, he acknowledged not to himself; but it was because he had outlived his age—most of his old set were gone—new hours, new habits had stolen in. He had ceased to be of importance as a marrying man, as a personage of fashion; his health was

[1] Cicero. The sentiment is borrowed by Juvenal.

impaired; he shrank from the fatigues of a contested election; he resigned his seat in Parliament for his native county, and, once settled at Laughton, the life there soothed and flattered him—there all his former claims to distinction were still fresh. He amused himself by collecting, in his old halls and chambers, his statues and pictures, and felt that, without fatigue or trouble, he was a greater man at Laughton in his old age than he had been in London during his youth.

Lucretia was then thirteen. Three years afterwards, Olivier Dalibard was established in the house, and from that time a great change became noticeable in her. The irregular vehemence of her temper gradually subsided, and was replaced by an habitual self-command, which rendered the rare deviations from it more effective and imposing. Her pride changed its character wholly and permanently; no word, no look of scorn to the low-born and the poor escaped her. The masculine studies which her erudite tutor opened to a grasping and inquisitive mind, elevated her very errors above the petty distinctions of class. She imbibed earnestly what Dalibard assumed or felt, —the more dangerous pride of the fallen angel,—and set up the intellect as a deity. All belonging to the mere study of mind charmed and enchained her; but active and practical in her very reveries, if she brooded, it was to scheme, to plot, to weave, web, and mesh, and to smile in haughty triumph at her own ingenuity and daring. The first lesson of mere worldly wisdom teaches us to command temper; it was worldly wisdom that made the once impetuous girl calm, tranquil and serene. Sir Miles was pleased by a change that removed from Lucretia's outward character its chief blot; perhaps, as his frame declined, he sighed sometimes to think that with so much majesty there appeared but little tenderness; he took, however, the merits with the faults, and was content upon the whole.

If the Provençal had taken more than common pains with his young pupil, the pains were not solely disinterested. In plunging her mind amidst that profound corruption which belongs only to intellect cultivated in scorn of good, and in suppression of heart, he had his own views to serve. He watched the age when the passions ripen; and he grasped at

the fruit which his training sought to mature. In the human heart ill regulated there is a dark desire for the forbidden. This Lucretia felt—this her studies cherished, and her thoughts brooded over. She detected, with the quickness of her sex, the preceptor's stealthy aim. She started not at the danger. Proud of her mastery over herself, she rather triumphed in luring on into weakness this master-intelligence which had lighted up her own,—to see her slave in her teacher—to despise or to pity him whom she had first contemplated with awe. And with this mere pride of the understanding might be connected that of the sex; she had attained the years when woman is curious to know and to sound her power. To inflame Dalibard's cupidity or ambition was easy; but to touch his *heart*—that marble heart!—this had its dignity and its charm. Strange to say, she succeeded. The passion, as well as interests, of this dangerous and able man became enlisted in his hopes; and now the game played between them had a terror in its suspense; for if Dalibard penetrated not into the recesses of his pupil's complicated nature, she was far from having yet sounded the hell that lay black and devouring beneath his own. Not through her affections—those he scarce hoped for—but through her inexperience, her vanity, her passions, he contemplated the path to his victory over her soul and her fate. And so resolute, so wily, so unscrupulous was this person, who had played upon all the subtlest keys and chords in the scale of turbulent life, that, despite the lofty smile with which Lucretia at length heard and repelled his suit, he had no fear of the ultimate issue, when all his projects were traversed,—all his mines and stratagems abruptly brought to a close, by an event which he had wholly unforeseen—the appearance of a rival; the ardent and almost purifying love, which, escaping a while from all the demons he had evoked, she had, with a girl's frank heart and impulse, conceived for Mainwaring. And here, indeed, was the great crisis in Lucretia's life and destiny. So interwoven with her nature had become the hard calculations of the understanding; so habitual to her now was the zest for scheming, which revels in the play and vivacity of intrigue and plot, and which

Shakspeare has, perhaps, intended chiefly to depict in the villany of Iago, that it is probable Lucretia could never become a character thoroughly amiable and honest. But with a happy and well-placed love, her ambition might have had legitimate vents; her restless energies, the woman's natural field in sympathies for another. The heart once opened, softens by use: gradually and unconsciously the interchange of affection, the companionship with an upright and ingenuous mind (for virtue is not only beautiful, it is contagious) might have had their redeeming and hallowing influence. Happier, indeed, had it been, if her choice had fallen upon a more commanding and lofty nature. But perhaps it was the very meekness and susceptibility of Mainwaring's temper, relieved from feebleness by his talents, which, once in play, were undeniably great, that pleased her by contrast with her own hardness of spirit and despotism of will.

That Sir Miles should have been blind to the position of the lovers, is less disparaging to his penetration than it may appear; for the very imprudence with which Lucretia abandoned herself to the society of Mainwaring during his visits at Laughton took a resemblance to candour. Sir Miles knew his niece to be more than commonly clever and well informed; that she, like him, should feel that the conversation of a superior young man was a relief to the ordinary babble of their country neighbours, was natural enough; and if now and then a doubt, a fear, had crossed his mind, and rendered him more touched than he liked to own by Vernon's remarks, it had vanished upon perceiving that Lucretia never seemed a shade more pensive in Mainwaring's absence. The listlessness and the melancholy which are apt to accompany love, especially where unpropitiously placed, were not visible on the surface of this strong nature. In truth, once assured that Mainwaring returned her affection, Lucretia reposed on the future with a calm and resolute confidence; and her customary dissimulation closed like an unruffled sea over all the undercurrents that met and played below. Still, Sir Miles's attention once, however slightly, aroused to the recollection that Lucretia was at the age when woman naturally meditates upon love and marriage, had

suggested, afresh and more vividly, a project which had before been indistinctly conceived—namely, the union of the divided branches of his house, by the marriage of the last male of the Vernons with the heiress of the St. Johns. Sir Miles had seen much of Vernon himself, at various intervals: he had been present at his christening, though he had refused to be his godfather, for fear of raising undue expectations; he had visited and munificently "tipped" him at Eton; he had accompanied him to his quarters when he joined the Prince's regiment; he had come often in contact with him, when, at the death of his father, Vernon retired from the army and blazed in the front ranks of metropolitan fashion; he had given him counsel and had even lent him money. Vernon's spendthrift habits, and dissipated if not dissolute life, had certainly confirmed the old baronet in his intentions to trust the lands of Laughton to the lesser risk which property incurs in the hands of a female, if tightly settled on her, than in the more colossal and multiform luxuries of an expensive man; and to do him justice, during the flush of Vernon's riotous career, he had shrunk from the thought of confiding the happiness of his niece to so unstable a partner. But of late, whether from his impaired health, or his broken fortunes, Vernon's follies had been less glaring. He had now arrived at the mature age of thirty-three, when wild oats may reasonably be sown. The composed and steadfast character of Lucretia might serve to guide and direct him: and Sir Miles was one of those who hold the doctrine that a reformed rake makes the best husband; add to this, there was nothing in Vernon's reputation (once allowing that his thirst for pleasure was slaked) which could excite serious apprehensions. Through all his difficulties, he had maintained his honour unblemished; a thousand traits of amiability and kindness of heart made him popular and beloved. He was nobody's enemy but his own. His very distresses—the prospect of his ruin, if left unassisted by Sir Miles's testamentary dispositions — were arguments in his favour. And, after all, though Lucretia was a nearer relation, Vernon was in truth the direct male heir, and, according to the usual prejudices of family, therefore,

the fitter representative of the ancient line. With these feelings and views, he had invited Vernon to his house, and we have seen already that his favourable impressions had been confirmed by the visit.

And here we must say, that Vernon himself had been brought up in boyhood and youth to regard himself the presumptive inheritor of Laughton. It had been, from time immemorial, the custom of the St. Johns to pass by the claims of females in the settlement of the entails; from male to male the estate had gone—furnishing warriors to the army and senators to the state. And if when Lucretia first came to Sir Miles's house the bright prospect seemed somewhat obscure, still the *mésalliance* of the mother, and Sir Miles's obstinate resentment thereat, seemed to warrant the supposition that he would probably only leave to the orphan the usual portion of a daughter of the house, and that the lands would go in their ordinary destination. This belief, adopted passively, and as a thing of course, had had a very prejudicial effect upon Vernon's career. What mattered that he over-enjoyed his youth, that the subordinate property of the Vernons, a paltry four or five thousand pounds a year, went a little too fast—the splendid estates of Laughton would recover all. From this dream he had only been awakened two or three years before, by an attachment he had formed to the portionless daughter of an earl; and the Grange being too far encumbered to allow him the proper settlements which the lady's family required, it became a matter of importance to ascertain Sir Miles's intentions. Too delicate himself to sound them, he had prevailed upon the earl, who was well acquainted with Sir Miles, to take Laughton in his way to his own seat in Dorsetshire, and, without betraying the grounds of his interest in the question, learn, carelessly, as it were, the views of the wealthy man. The result had been a severe and terrible disappointment. Sir Miles had then fully determined upon constituting Lucretia his heiress, and, with the usual openness of his character, he had plainly said so upon the very first covert and polished allusion to the subject, which the earl slily made. This discovery, in breaking off all hopes of a union with Lady Mary Stanville, had crushed more than

mercenary expectations. It affected, through his heart, Vernon's health and spirits; it rankled deep, and was resented at first as a fatal injury. But Vernon's native nobility of disposition gradually softened an indignation which his reason convinced him was groundless and unjust. Sir Miles had never encouraged the expectations which Vernon's family and himself had unthinkingly formed. The baronet was master of his own fortune, and after all, was it not more natural that he should prefer the child he had brought up and reared, to a distant relation, little more than an acquaintance, simply because man succeeded to man in the mouldy pedigree of the St. Johns? And, Mary fairly lost to him, his constitutional indifference to money, a certain French levity of temper, a persuasion that his life was nearing its wasted close, had left him without regret, as without resentment, at his kinsman's decision. His boyish affection for the hearty, generous old gentleman returned, and though he abhorred the country, he had, without a single interested thought or calculation cordially accepted the Baronet's hospitable overtures, and deserted, for the wilds of Hampshire, "the sweet shady side of Pall Mall."

We may now enter the drawing-room at Laughton, in which were already assembled several of the families residing in the more immediate neighbourhood, and who sociably dropped in to chat around the national tea-table, play a rubber at whist, or make up, by the help of two or three children, and two or three grandpapas, a merry country dance. For, in that happy day, people were much more sociable than they are now, in the houses of our rural Thanes. Our country seats became bustling and animated after the Birthday; many even of the more important families resided, indeed, all the year round on their estates. The Continent was closed to us; the fastidious exclusiveness which comes from habitual residence in cities, had not made that demarcation in castes and in talk, between neighbour and neighbour, which exists now. Our squires were less educated, less refined, but more hospitable and unassuming. In a word, there was what does not exist now, except in some districts remote from London,—a rural society for those who sought it.

The party, as we enter, is grouped somewhat thus—but first, we must cast a glance at the room itself, which rarely failed to

be the first object to attract a stranger's notice. It was a long, and not particularly well-proportioned apartment, according, at least, to modern notions, for it had rather the appearance of two rooms thrown into one. At the distance of about thirty-five feet, the walls, before somewhat narrow, were met by an arch, supported by carved pilasters, which opened into a space nearly double the width of the previous part of the room, with a domed ceiling, and an embayed window of such depth, that the recess almost formed a chamber in itself. But both these divisions of the apartment corresponded exactly in point of decoration; they had the same small panelling, painted a very light green, which seemed almost white by candlelight, each compartment wrought with an arabesque, the same enriched frieze and cornice; they had the same high mantelpieces, ascending to the ceiling, with the arms of St. John in bold relief. They had too the same old-fashioned and venerable furniture, draperies of thick figured velvet, with immense chairs and sofas to correspond, interspersed, it is true, with more modern and commodious inventions of the upholsterer's art, in grave stuffed leather, or lively chintz. Two windows, nearly as deep as that in the further division, broke the outline of the former one, and helped to give that irregular and *nooky* appearance to the apartment, which took all discomfort from its extent, and furnished all convenience for solitary study or detached flirtation. With little respect for the carved work of the panels, the walls were covered with pictures brought by Sir Miles from Italy; here and there marble busts and statues gave lightness to the character of the room, and harmonised well with that half Italian mode of decoration which belongs to the period of James the First. The shape of the chamber, in its divisions, lent itself admirably to that friendly and sociable intermixture of amusements which reconciles the tastes of young and old. In the first division, near the fireplace, Sir Miles, seated in his easy-chair, and sheltered from the opening door by a seven-fold tapestry screen, was still at chess with his librarian. At a little distance, a middle-aged gentleman, and three turbaned matrons, were cutting in at whist—shilling points—with a half-crown bet, optional, and not much ventured on. On tables, drawn into the recesses of the windows, were

the day's newspapers, Gilray's caricatures, the last new publications, and such other ingenious suggestions to chit-chat. And round these tables grouped those who had not yet found elsewhere their evening's amusement; two or three shy young clergymen, the parish doctor, four or five squires, who felt great interest in politics, but never dreamt of the extravagance of taking in a daily paper, and who now, monopolising all the journals they could find, began fairly with the heroic resolution to skip nothing, from the first advertisement to the printer's name. Amidst one of these groups, Mainwaring had bashfully ensconced himself. In the further division, the chandelier, suspended from the domed ceiling, threw its cheerful light over a large circular table below, on which gleamed the ponderous tea-urn of massive silver, with its usual accompaniments. Nor were wanting there, in addition to those airy nothings, sliced infinitesimally, from a French roll, the more substantial, and now exiled cheer, of cakes—plum and seed Yorkshire and saffron—attesting the light hand of the housekeeper, and the strong digestion of the guests. Round this table were seated, in full gossip, the maids and the matrons with a slight sprinkling of the bolder young gentlemen who had been taught to please the fair. The warmth of the evening allowed the upper casement to be opened and the curtains drawn aside, and the July moonlight feebly struggled against the blaze of the lights within. At this table it was Miss Clavering's obvious duty to preside; but that was a complaisance to which she rarely condescended. Nevertheless, she had her own way of doing the honour of her uncle's house, which was not without courtesy and grace; to glide from one to the other, exchange a few friendly words, see that each set had its well-known amusements, and, finally, sit quietly down to converse with some who, from gravity or age, appeared most to neglect, or be neglected by the rest, was her ordinary, and not unpopular mode of welcoming the guests at Laughton—not unpopular, for she thus avoided all interference with the flirtations and conquests of humbler damsels, whom her station and her endowments might otherwise have crossed or humbled, while she insured the good word of the old, to whom the young

are seldom so attentive. But if a stranger of more than provincial repute chanced to be present, if some stray member of parliament, or barrister on the circuit, or wandering artist, accompanied any of the neighbours, to him Lucretia gave more earnest and undivided attention. Him she sought to draw into a conversation deeper than the usual babble, and with her calm, searching eyes, bent on him while he spoke seemed to fathom the intellect she set in play. But as yet, this evening, she had not made her appearance—a sin against etiquette very unusual in her. Perhaps her recent conversation with Dalibard had absorbed her thoughts to forgetfulness of the less important demands on her attention. Her absence had not interfered with the gaiety at the tea-table, which was frank even to noisiness as it centred round the laughing face of Ardworth, who, though unknown to most or all of the ladies present, beyond a brief introduction to one or two of the first comers from Sir Miles (as the host had risen from his chess to bid them welcome), had already contrived to make himself perfectly at home, and outrageously popular. Niched between two bouncing lasses, he had commenced acquaintance with them in a strain of familiar drollery and fun, which had soon broadened its circle, and now embraced the whole group in the happy contagion of good humour and young animal spirits. Gabriel, allowed to sit up later than his usual hour, had not, as might have been expected, attached himself to this circle, nor indeed to any; he might be seen moving quietly about—now contemplating the pictures on the wall with a curious eye—now pausing at the whist-table, and noting the game with the interest of an embryo gamester—now throwing himself on an ottoman, and trying to coax towards him Dash or Ponto—trying in vain, for both the dogs abhorred him; yet still, through all this general movement, had any one taken the pains to observe him closely, it might have been sufficiently apparent that his keen, bright, restless eye, from the corner of its long, sly lids, roved chiefly towards the three persons whom he approached the least—his father, Mainwaring, and Mr. Vernon. This last had ensconced himself apart from all, in the angle formed by one of the pilasters of

the arch that divided the room, so that he was in command, as it were, of both sections. Reclined, with the careless grace that seemed inseparable from every attitude and motion of his person, in one of the great velvet chairs, with a book in his hand, which, to say truth, was turned upside down, but in the lecture of which he seemed absorbed—he heard at one hand the mirthful laughter that circled round young Ardworth, or, in its pauses, caught on the other side, muttered exclamations from the grave whist-players—"If you had but trumped that diamond, ma'am!"—"Bless me, sir, it was the best heart!" And somehow or other, both the laughter and the exclamations affected him alike, with what then was called "the spleen"—for the one reminded him of his own young days of joyless, careless mirth, of which his mechanical gaiety now was but a mocking ghost, and the other seemed a satire, a parody, on the fierce but noiseless rapture of gaming, through which his passions had passed—when thousands had slipped away with a bland smile, provoking not one of those natural ebullitions of emotion which there accompanied the loss of a shilling point. And besides this, Vernon had been so accustomed to the success of the drawing-room, to be a somebody and a something in the company of wits and princes, that he felt, for the first time, a sense of insignificance in this provincial circle. Those fat squires had heard nothing of Mr. Vernon, except that he would not have Laughton—he had no acres, no vote in their county—he was a nobody to them. Those ruddy maidens, though now and then, indeed, one or two might steal an admiring glance at a figure of elegance so unusual, regarded him not with the female interest he had been accustomed to inspire. They felt instinctively that he could be nothing to them, nor they to him—a mere London fop, and not half so handsome as Squires Bluff and Chuff.

Rousing himself from this little vexation to his vanity, with a conscious smile at his own weakness, Vernon turned his looks towards the door, waiting for Lucretia's entrance, and since her uncle's address to him, feeling that new and indescribable interest in her appearance, which is apt to steal into every breast, when what was before but an indifferent acquaintance, is

suddenly enhaloed with the light of a possible wife. At length, the door opened, and Lucretia entered. Mr. Vernon lowered his book, and gazed with an earnestness that partook both of doubt and admiration.

Lucretia Clavering was tall—tall beyond what is admitted to be tall in woman; but in her height there was nothing either awkward or masculine—a figure more perfect never served for model to a sculptor. The dress at that day, unbecoming as we now deem it, was not to her—at least, on the whole—disadvantageous. The short waist gave greater sweep to her majestic length of limb, while the classic thinness of the drapery betrayed the exact proportion and the exquisite contour. The arms then were worn bare almost to the shoulder, and Lucretia's arms were not more faultless in shape than dazzling in their snowy colour—the stately neck, the falling shoulders, the firm, slight, yet rounded bust—all would have charmed equally the artist and the sensualist. Fortunately, the sole defect of her form was not apparent at a distance; that defect was in the hand; it had not the usual faults of female youthfulness—the superfluity of flesh, the too rosy healthfulness of colour; on the contrary, it was small and thin, but it was, nevertheless, more the hand of a man than a woman; the shape had a man's nervous distinctness, the veins swelled like sinews, the joints of the fingers were marked and prominent. In that hand, it almost seemed as if the iron force of the character betrayed itself. But, as we have said, this slight defect which few, if seen, would hypercritically notice, could not of course be perceptible as she moved slowly up the room; and Vernon's eye, glancing over the noble figure, rested upon the face. Was it handsome?—was it repelling? Strange that in feature it had pretensions to the highest order of beauty, and yet, even that experienced connoisseur in female charms was almost puzzled what sentence to pronounce. The hair, as was the fashion of the day, clustered in profuse curls over the forehead, but could not conceal a slight line or wrinkle between the brows; and this line, rare in women at any age, rare even in men at hers, gave an expression at once of thought and sternness to the whole face. The eyebrows themselves

were straight, and not strongly marked, — a shade or two perhaps too light, a fault still more apparent in the lashes; the eyes were large, full, and though bright, astonishingly calm and deep, at least in ordinary moments; yet withal they wanted the charm of that steadfast and open look which goes at once to the heart and invites its trust; their expression was rather vague and abstracted. She usually looked aslant while she spoke, and this, which with some appears but shyness, in one so self-collected had an air of falsehood. But when, at times, if earnest, and bent rather on examining those she addressed than guarding herself from penetration, she fixed those eyes upon you with sudden and direct scrutiny, the gaze impressed you powerfully, and haunted you with a strange spell. The eye itself was of a peculiar and displeasing colour—not blue, nor grey, nor black, nor hazel, but rather of that cat-like green, which is drowsy in the light, and vivid in the shade. The profile was purely Greek, and so seen, Lucretia's beauty seemed incontestable; but in front face, and still more when inclined between the two, all the features took a sharpness, that, however regular, had something chilling and severe; the mouth was small, but the lips were thin and pale, and had an expression of effort and contraction, which added to the distrust that her sidelong glance was calculated to inspire. The teeth were dazzlingly white, but sharp and thin, and the eye-teeth were much longer than the rest. The complexion was pale, but without much delicacy; the paleness seemed not natural to it, but rather that hue which study and late vigils give to men; so that she wanted the freshness and bloom of youth, and looked older than she was—an effect confirmed by an absence of roundness in the cheek, not noticeable in the profile, but rendering the front face somewhat harsh as well as sharp. In a word, the face and the figure were not in harmony; the figure prevented you from pronouncing her to be masculine —the face took from the figure the charm of feminacy. It was the head of the young Augustus upon the form of Agrippina. One touch more, and we close a description, which already perhaps the reader may consider frivolously

minute. If you had placed before the mouth and lower part of the face a mask or bandage, the whole character of the upper face would have changed at once; the eye lost its glittering falseness, the brow its sinister contraction; you would have pronounced the face not only beautiful, but sweet and womanly. Take that bandage suddenly away, and the change would have startled you, and startled you the more because you could detect no sufficient defect or disproportion in the lower part of the countenance to explain it. It was as if the mouth was the key to the whole: the key nothing without the text, the text uncomprehended without the key.

Such, then, was Lucretia Clavering in outward appearance, at the age of twenty—striking to the most careless eye—interesting and perplexing the student in that dark language never yet deciphered,—the human countenance. The reader must have observed, that the effect every face that he remarks for the first time produces, is different from the impression it leaves upon him when habitually seen. Perhaps, no two persons differ more from each other than does the same countenance in our earliest recollection of it from the countenance regarded in the familiarity of repeated intercourse. And this was especially the case with Lucretia Clavering's; the first impulse of nearly all who beheld it was distrust that partook of fear; it almost inspired you with a sense of danger. The judgment rose up against it; the heart set itself on its guard. But this uneasy sentiment soon died away with most observers, in admiration at the chiselled outline, which, like the Grecian sculpture, gained the more the more it was examined, in respect for the intellectual power of the expression, and in fascinated pleasure at the charm of a smile, rarely employed, it is true, but the more attractive, both for that reason and for its sudden effect in giving brightness and persuasion to an aspect that needed them so much. It was literally like the abrupt breaking out of a sunbeam; and the repellent impression of the face, thus familiarised away, the matchless form took its natural influence: so that, while one who but saw Lucretia for a moment, might have pronounced her almost plain, and certainly not prepossessing in appearance, those with whom she lived, those whom she sought to please, those

who saw her daily, united in acknowledgment of her beauty; and if they still felt awe, attributed it only to the force of her understanding.

As she now came midway up the room, Gabriel started from his seat, and ran to her caressingly. Lucretia bent down, and placed her hand upon his fair locks. As she did so, he whispered—

"Mr. Vernon has been watching for you."

"Hush! Where is your father?"

"Behind the screen, at chess with Sir Miles."

"With Sir Miles!" and Lucretia's eye fell, with the direct gaze we have before referred to, upon the boy's face.

"I have been looking over them pretty often," said he, meaningly: "they have talked of nothing but the game."

Lucretia lifted her head, and glanced round with her furtive eye; the boy divined the search, and with a scarce perceptible gesture, pointed her attention to Mainwaring's retreat. Her vivid smile passed over her lips, as she bowed slightly to her lover, and then withdrawing the hand which Gabriel had taken in his own, she moved on, passed Vernon with a commonplace word or two, and was soon exchanging greetings with the gay merry-makers in the farther part of the room. A few minutes afterwards, the servants entered, the tea-table was removed, chairs thrust back—a single lady of a certain age volunteered her services at the piano, and dancing began within the ample space which the arch fenced off from the whist-players. Vernon had watched his opportunity, and at the first sound of the piano had gained Lucretia's side, and with grave politeness pre-engaged her hand for the opening dance.

At that day, though it is not so very long ago, gentlemen were not ashamed to dance, and to dance well; it was no languid saunter through a quadrille; it was fair, deliberate, skilful dancing, amongst the courtly; free, bounding movement amongst the gay.

Vernon, as might be expected, was the most admired performer of the evening; but he was thinking very little of the notice he at last excited; he was employing such ingenuity as his experience of life supplied to the deficiencies of a very

imperfect education, limited to the little flogged into him at Eton, in deciphering the character and getting at the heart of his fair partner.

"I wonder you do not make Sir Miles take you to London, my cousin, if you will allow me to call you so. You ought to have been presented."

"I have no wish to go to London yet."

"Yet!" said Mr. Vernon, with the somewhat *fade* gallantry of his day; "beauty even like yours has little time to spare."

"Hands across, hands across!" cried Mr. Ardworth.

"And," continued Mr. Vernon, as soon as a pause was permitted to him, "there is a song which the Prince sings, written by some sensible, old-fashioned fellow which says—

"'Gather your rosebuds while you may,
For time is still a flying.'"

"You have obeyed the moral of the song yourself, I believe, Mr. Vernon."

"Call me cousin, or Charles—Charley, if you like—as most of my friends do: nobody ever calls me Mr. Vernon; I don't know myself by that name."

"Down the middle, we are all waiting for you," shouted Ardworth.

And down the middle with wondrous grace glided the exquisite nankeens of Charley Vernon.

The dance now, thanks to Ardworth, became too animated and riotous to allow more than a few broken monosyllables till Vernon and his partner gained the end of the set, and then, flirting his partner's fan, he recommenced—

"Seriously, my cousin, you must sometimes feel very much moped here."

"Never!" answered Lucretia. Not once yet had her eye rested on Mr. Vernon. She felt that she was sounded.

"Yet I am sure you have a taste for the pomps and vanities. Aha! there is ambition under those careless curls," said Mr Vernon, with his easy adorable impertinence.

Lucretia winced.

"But if I were ambitious, what field for ambition could I find in London?"

"The same as Alexander—empire, my cousin."

"You forget that I am not a man. Man, indeed, may hope for an empire. It is something to be a Pitt, or even a Warren Hastings."

Mr. Vernon stared. Was this stupidity or what?

"A woman has an empire more undisputed than Mr. Pitt's, and more pitiless than that of Governor Hastings."

"Oh pardon me, Mr. Vernon——"

"Charles, if you please."

Lucretia's brow darkened.

"Pardon me," she repeated; "but these compliments, if such they are meant to be, meet a very ungrateful return. A woman's empire over gauzes and ribbons, over tea-tables and drums, over fops and coquettes, is not worth a journey from Laughton to London"

"You think you can despise admiration?"

"What you mean by admiration—yes."

"And love, too?" said Vernon, in a whisper.

Now Lucretia at once and abruptly raised her eyes to her partner. Was he aiming at her secret?—was he hinting at intentions of his own? The look chilled Vernon, and he turned away his head.

Suddenly, then, in pursuance of a new train of ideas, Lucretia altered her manner to him. She had detected what before she had surmised. This sudden familiarity on his part arose from notions her uncle had instilled—the visitor had been incited to become the suitor. Her penetration into character, which from childhood had been her passionate study, told her that on that light, polished, fearless nature, scorn would have slight effect—to meet the familiarity would be the best means to secure a friend, to disarm a wooer. She changed then her manner: she summoned up her extraordinary craft: she accepted the intimacy held out to her, not to unguard herself, but to lay open her opponent. It became necessary to her to know this man, to have such power as the knowledge might give her. Insensibly and gradually she led her companion away from his design of approaching her own secrets or character, into frank talk about himself. All unconsciously

he began to lay bare to his listener the infirmities of his erring, open heart. Silently she looked down, and plumbed them all: the frivolity, the recklessness, the half gay, half mournful sense of waste and ruin. There, blooming amongst the wrecks, she saw the fairest flowers of noble manhood profuse and fragrant still—generosity and courage, and disregard for self. Spendthrift and gambler, on one side the medal; gentleman and soldier on the other. Beside this maimed and imperfect nature, she measured her own prepared and profound intellect, and as she listened, her smile became more bland and frequent. She could afford to be gracious; she felt superiority, scorn, and safety.

As this seeming intimacy had matured, Vernon and his partner had quitted the dance, and were conversing apart in the recess of one of the windows, which the newspaper readers had deserted, in the part of the room where Sir Miles and Dalibard, still seated, were about to commence their third game at chess. The baronet's hand ceased from the task of arranging his pawns; his eye was upon the pair, and then, after a long and complacent gaze, it looked round without discovering the object it sought.

"I am about to task your kindness most improperly, Monsieur Dalibard," said Sir Miles, with that politeness so displeasing to Ardworth, "but will you do me the favour to move aside that fold of the screen? I wish for a better view of our young people. Thank you very much."

Sir Miles now discovered Mainwaring, and observed that far from regarding with self-betraying jealousy the apparent flirtation going on between Lucretia and her kinsman, he was engaged in animated conversation with the chairman of the quarter sessions. Sir Miles was satisfied, and ranged his pawns. All this time, and indeed ever since they had sat down to play, the Provençal had been waiting with the patience that belonged to his character, for some observation from Sir Miles on the subject, which his sagacity perceived, was engrossing his thoughts. There had been about the old gentleman a fidgety restlessness which showed that something was on his mind. His eyes had been frequently turned towards

his niece since her entrance; once or twice he had cleared his throat and hemmed,—his usual prelude to some more important communication; and Dalibard had heard him muttering to himself, and fancied he caught the name of, "Mainwaring." And indeed the baronet had been repeatedly on the verge of sounding his secretary, and as often had been checked both by pride in himself and pride for Lucretia. It seemed to him beneath his own dignity and hers even to hint to an inferior a fear, a doubt of the heiress of Laughton. Olivier Dalibard could easily have led on his patron—he could easily, if he pleased it, have dropped words to instill suspicion and prompt question, but that was not his object; he rather shunned than courted any reference to himself upon the matter; for he knew that Lucretia, if she could suppose that he, however indirectly, had betrayed her to her uncle, would at once declare his own suit to her, and so procure his immediate dismissal; while aware of her powers of dissimulation, and her influence over her uncle, he feared that a single word from her would suffice to remove all suspicion in Sir Miles, however ingeniously implanted, and however truthfully grounded. But all the while, under his apparent calm, his mind was busy, and his passions burning.

"Pshaw, your old play—the bishop again!" said Sir Miles, laughing, as he moved a knight to frustrate his adversary's supposed plan; and then turning back, he once more contemplated the growing familiarity between Vernon and his niece. This time he could not contain his pleasure; "Dalibard, my dear sir," he said, rubbing his hands, "look yonder; they would make a handsome couple!"

"Who, sir?" said the Provençal, looking another way, with dogged stupidity.

"Who? damn it, man! nay, pray forgive my ill manners—but I felt glad, sir, and proud, sir. Who? Charley Vernon and Lucretia Clavering."

"Assuredly, yes. Do you think that there is a chance of so happy an event!"

"Why, it depends only on Lucretia; I shall never force her." Here Sir Miles stopped, for Gabriel, unperceived before, picked up his patron's pocket-handkerchief.

Olivier Dalibard's grey eyes rested coldly on his son: "You are not dancing to-night, my boy. Go; I like to see you amused."

The boy obeyed at once, as he always did, the paternal commands. He found a partner, and joined a dance just begun; and in the midst of the dance, Honoré Gabriel Varney seemed a new being: not Ardworth himself so thoroughly entered into the enjoyment of the exercise, the lights, the music. With brilliant eyes and dilated nostrils, he seemed prematurely to feel all that is exciting and voluptuous in that exhilaration, which to childhood is usually so innocent. His glances followed the fairest form: his clasp lingered in the softest hand; his voice trembled as the warm breath of his partner came on his cheeks.

Meanwhile the conversation between the chess-players continued.

"Yes," said the baronet, "it depends only on Lucretia—and she seems pleased with Vernon; who would not be?"

"Your penetration rarely deceives you, sir. I own I think with you. Does Mr. Vernon know that you would permit the alliance?"

"Yes; but——" the baronet stopped short.

"You were saying, but—but what, Sir Miles?"

"Why the dog affected diffidence; he had some fear lest he should not win her affections—but luckily, at least, they are disengaged."

Dalibard looked grave, and his eye, as if involuntarily, glanced towards Mainwaring. As ill luck would have it, the young man had then ceased his conversation with the chairman of the quarter sessions, and with arms folded, brow contracted, and looks, earnest, anxious, and intent, was contemplating the whispered conference between Lucretia and Vernon.

Sir Miles's eye had followed his secretary's, and his face changed. His hand fell on the chessboard, and upset half the men; he uttered a very audible "Zounds!"

"I think, Sir Miles," said the Provençal, rising as if conscious that Sir Miles wished to play no more—"I think that if you spoke soon to Miss Clavering, as to your views with regard to

Mr. Vernon, it might ripen matters; for I have heard it said by French mothers—and our Frenchwomen understand the female heart, sir—that a girl having no other affection is often prepossessed at once in favour of a man whom she knows beforehand is prepared to woo and to win her, whereas, without that knowledge, he would have seemed but an ordinary acquaintance."

"It is shrewdly said, my dear Monsieur Dalibard; and for more reasons than one, the sooner I speak to her the better. Lend me your arm,—it is time for supper,—I see the dance is over."

Passing by the place where Mainwaring still leant, the baronet looked at him fixedly. The young man did not notice the gaze. Sir Miles touched him gently. He started as from a reverie.

"You have not danced, Mr. Mainwaring."

"I dance so seldom, Sir Miles," said Mainwaring, colouring.

"Ah! you employ your head more than your heels, young gentleman; very right—I must speak to you to-morrow. Well, ladies, I hope you have enjoyed yourselves? My dear Mrs. Vesey, you and I are old friends, you know—many a minuet we have danced together, eh? We can't dance now—but we can walk arm-in-arm together still. Honour me. And your little grandson—vaccinated, eh? Wonderful invention! To supper, ladies—to supper!"

The company were gone. The lights were out,—all, save the lights of heaven, and they came bright and still through the casements: Moonbeam and Starbeam, they seemed now to have the old house to themselves. In came the rays, brighter, and longer, and bolder—like fairies that march rank upon rank, into their kingdom of solitude. Down the oak stairs, from the casements, blazoned with heraldry, moved the rays, creepingly, fearfully. On the armour in the hall clustered the rays boldly and brightly, till the steel shone out like a mirror. In the library, long and low, they just entered, stopped short—it was no place for their play. In the drawing-room, now deserted, they were more curious and adventurous. Through the large window, still open, they came in freely and archly, as if to spy what had caused

such disorder; the stiff chairs out of place, the smooth floor despoiled of its carpet,—that flower dropped on the ground—that scarf forgotten on the table—the rays lingered upon them all. Up and down through the house, from the base to the roof, roved the children of the air, and found but two spirits awake amidst the slumber of the rest.

In that tower to the east,—in the tapestry chamber, with the large gilded bed in the recess, came the rays, tamed and wan, as if scared by the grosser light on the table. By that table sat a girl, her brow leaning on one hand; in the other she held a rose—it is a love-token—exchanged with its sister rose, by stealth—in mute sign of reproach for doubt excited—an assurance and a reconciliation. A love-token!—shrink not, ye rays—there is something akin to you in love. But see, the hand closes convulsively on the flower,—it hides it not in the breast,—it lifts it not to the lip—it throws it passionately aside. "How long!" muttered the girl, impetuously—"how long! and to think that *will* here cannot shorten an hour!" Then she rose, and walked to and fro, and each time she gained a certain niche in the chamber, she paused, and then irresolutely passed on again. What is in that niche? Only books. What can books teach thee, pale girl? The step treads firmer; this time it halts more resolved. The hand that clasped the flower takes down a volume. The girl sits again before the light. See, oh, rays, what is the volume? Moon and Starbeam, ye love what lovers read by the lamp in the loneliness. No love-ditty this; no yet holier lesson to patience, and moral to hope. What hast thou, young girl, strong in health, and rich in years, with the lore of the leech,—with prognostics, and symptoms, and diseases? She is tracing with hard eyes the signs that precede the grim enemy, in his most sudden approach—the habits that invite him, the warnings that he gives. He whose wealth shall make her free, has twice had the visiting shock,—he starves not—he lives free! She closes the volume, and, musing, metes him out the hours and days he has to live. Shrink back, ye rays! The love is disenhallowed: while the hand was on the rose, the thought was on the charnel.

Yonder, in the opposite tower, in the small casement near the roof came the rays,—Childhood is asleep. Moon and Starbeam ye love the slumbers of the child! The door opens—a dark figure steals noiselessly in. The father comes to look on the sleep of his son. Holy tenderness, if this be all!

"Gabriel, wake!" said a low stern voice, and a rough hand shook the sleeper.

The sharpest test of those nerves, upon which depends the mere animal courage, is to be roused suddenly, in the depth of night, by a violent hand. The impulse of Gabriel, thus startled, was neither of timidity nor surprise. It was that of some Spartan boy, not new to danger: with a slight cry, and a fierce spring, the son's hand clutched at the father's throat. Dalibard shook him off with an effort, and a smile, half in approval, half in irony, played by the moonlight over his lips.

"Blood will out, young tiger," said he. "Hush, and hear me!"

"Is it you, father?" said Gabriel; "I thought—I dreamed ——"

"No matter; think—dream always that man should be prepared for defence from peril!"

"Gabriel," and the pale scholar seated himself on the bed, "turn your face to mine—nearer; let the moon fall on it; lift your eyes—look at me—so! Are you not playing false to me? Are you not Lucretia's spy, while you are pretending to be mine? It is so; your eye betrays you. Now, heed me; you have a mind beyond your years. Do you love best the miserable garret in London, the hard fare and squalid dress,—or your lodgment here, the sense of luxury, the sight of splendour, the atmosphere of wealth? You have the choice before you."

"I choose as you would have me, then," said the boy—"the last."

"I believe you. Attend! you do not love me—that is natural,—you are the son of Clara Varney! You have supposed that in loving Lucretia Clavering, you might vex or thwart me, you scarce knew how; and Lucretia Clavering has gold, and gifts, and soft words, and promises, to bribe withal. I now tell you openly my plan with regard to this girl: it is my aim to marry

her—to be master of this house and these lands. If I succeed, you share them with me. By betraying me, word or look, to Lucretia, you frustrate this aim; you plot against our rise and to our ruin. Deem not that you could escape my fall; if I am driven hence—as you might drive me,—you share my fate; and mark me, you are delivered up to my revenge! You cease to be my son—you are my foe. Child! you know me."

The boy, bold as he was, shuddered; but, after a pause so brief that a breath scarce passed between his silence and his words he replied with emphasis,—

"Father, you have read my heart. I have been persuaded by Lucretia (for she bewitches me) to watch you—at least, when you are with Sir Miles. I knew that this was mixed up with Mr. Mainwaring. Now that you have made me understand your own views, I will be true to you—true without threats."

The father looked hard on him, and seemed satisfied with the gaze. "Remember, at least, that your future rests upon your truth; *that* is no threat—that is a thought of hope. Now sleep or muse on it." He dropped the curtain which his hand had drawn aside, and stole from the room as noiselessly as he had entered. The boy slept no more. Deceit, and cupidity, and corrupt ambition, were at work in his brain. Shrink back, Moon and Starbeam! On that child's brow play the demons who had followed the father's step to his bed of sleep.

Back to his own room, close at hand, crept Olivier Dalibard. The walls were lined with books—many in language and deep in lore. Moon and Starbeam, ye love the midnight solitude of the scholar! The Provençal stole to the casement, and looked forth. All was serene; breathless trees, and gleaming sculpture, and whitened sward, girdled by the mass of shadow. Of what thought the man? not of the present loveliness which the scene gave to his eye, nor of the future mysteries which the stars should whisper to the soul. Gloomily over a stormy and a hideous past roved the memory, stored with fraud and foul with crime; plan upon plan, schemed with ruthless wisdom, followed up by remorseless daring, and yet all now a ruin and a blank!—an intellect at war with good, and the good had conquered! But the conviction neither touched the conscience, nor enlightened

the reason; he felt, it is true, a moody sense of impotence, but it brought rage not despondency: it was not that he submitted to Good as too powerful to oppose, but that he deemed he had not yet gained all the mastery over the arsenal of Evil. And evil he called it not. Good and evil to him were but subordinate genii, at the command of Mind; they were the slaves of the lamp. But had he got at the true secret of the lamp itself? "How is it," he thought, as he turned impatiently from the casement, "that I am baffled here where my fortunes seemed most assured? Here the mind has been of my own training, and prepared by nature to my hand;—here all opportunity has smiled. And suddenly the merest commonplace, in the vulgar lives of mortals—an unlooked-for rival,—rival, too of the mould I had taught her to despise—one of the stock gallants of a comedy—no character, but youth and fair looks; yea, the lover of the stage starts up, and the fabric of years is overthrown." As he thus mused, he placed his hand upon a small box on one of the tables. "Yet, within this," resumed his soliloquy, and he struck the lid, that gave back a dull sound,—"within this, I hold the keys of life and death! Fool! the power does not reach to the heart except to still it. Verily and indeed, were the old heathens mistaken? Are there no philtres to change the current of desire?—but touch one chord in a girl's affection, and all the rest is mine—all—all, lands, station, power—all the rest are in the opening of this lid!"

Hide in the cloud, O Moon!—shrink back, ye Stars! send not your holy, pure, and trouble-lulling light to the countenance blanched and livid with the thoughts of murder.

CHAPTER III.

CONFERENCES.

THE next day Sir Miles did not appear at breakfast; not that he was unwell, but that he meditated holding certain audiences, and on such occasions the good old gentleman liked to prepare himself. He belonged to a school in which, amidst much that

was hearty and convivial, there was much alsc that, nowadays, would seem stiff and formal, contrasting the other school immediately succeeding him, which Mr. Vernon represented, and of which the Charles Surface of Sheridan is a faithful and admirable type. The room that Sir Miles appropriated to himself was, properly speaking, the state apartment, called, in the old inventories, "King James's chamber;" it was on the first floor, communicating with the picture-gallery, which, at the farther end, opened upon a corridor admitting to the principal bedrooms. As Sir Miles cared nothing for holiday state, he had unscrupulously taken his *cubiculum* in this chamber, which was really the handsomest in the house, except the banquet-hall; placed his bed in one angle, with a huge screen before it, filled up the space with his Italian antiquities and curiosities, and fixed his favourite pictures on the faded gilt leather panelled on the walls. His main motive in this was the communication with the adjoining gallery, which, when the weather was unfavourable, furnished ample room for his habitual walk. He knew how many strides by the help of his crutch made a mile, and this was convenient. Moreover he liked to look, when alone, on those old portraits of his ancestors, which he had religiously conserved in their places, preferring to thrust his Florentine and Venetian masterpieces into bedrooms and parlours, rather than to dislodge from the gallery the stiff ruffs, doublets, and fardingales of his predecessors. It was whispered in the house, that the baronet, whenever he had to reprove a tenant, or lecture a dependant, took care to have him brought to his sanctum, through the full length of this gallery, so that the victim might be duly prepared and awed by the imposing effect of so stately a journey, and the grave faces of all the generations of St. John, which could not fail to impress him with the dignity of the family, and alarm him at the prospect of the injured frown of its representative. Across this gallery, now, following the steps of the powdered valet, strode young Ardworth; staring now and then at some portrait more than usually grim, more often wondering why his boots, that never creaked before, should creak on those particular boards, and feeling

a quiet curiosity without the least mixture of fear or awe as to what old Squaretoes intended to say to him. But all feeling of irreverence ceased when, shown into the baronet's room, and the door closed, Sir Miles rose with a smile, and cordially shaking his hand, said, dropping the punctilious courtesy of Mister—"Ardworth, sir, if I had a little prejudice against you, before you came, you have conquered it. You are a fine, manly, spirited fellow, sir; and you have an old man's good wishes, which are no bad beginning to a young man's good fortune."

The colour rushed over Ardworth's forehead, and a tear sprang to his eyes. He felt a rising at his throat, as he stammered out some not very audible reply.

"I wished to see you, young gentleman, that I might judge myself what you would like best, and what would best fit you. Your father is in the army; what say you to a pair of colours?"

"Oh, Sir Miles, that is my utmost ambition! Anything but law, except the Church; anything but the Church, except the desk and a counter!"

The baronet, much pleased, gave him a gentle pat on the shoulder. "Ha, ha! *we* gentlemen, you see (for the Ardworths are very well born—very), *we gentlemen* understand each other! Between you and me, I never liked the law—never thought a man of birth should belong to it—take money for lying—shabby—shocking! Don't let that go any further! The church—Mother Church—I honour her! Church and state go together! But one ought to be very good to preach to others—better than you and I are—eh? ha, ha! Well, then, you like the army—there's a letter for you to the Horse Guards—go up to town—your business is done; and, as for your outfit—read this little book at your leisure." And Sir Miles thrust a pocket-book into Ardworth's hand.

"But pardon me," said the young man, much bewildered. "What claim have I, Sir Miles, to such generosity? I know that my uncle offended you."

"Sir, that's the claim!" said Sir Miles, gravely. I cannot live long," he added, with a touch of melancholy in his voice;

"let me die in peace with all!—perhaps I injured your uncle? Who knows but, if so, he hears and pardons me now?"

"Oh, Sir Miles!" exclaimed the thoughtless, generous-hearted young man, "and my little playfellow, Susan, your own niece!"

Sir Miles drew back haughtily; but the burst that offended him rose so evidently from the heart, was so excusable from its motive, and the youth's ignorance of the world, that his frown soon vanished, as he said, calmly and gravely—

"No man, my good sir, can allow to others the right to touch on his family affairs; I trust I shall be just to the poor young lady; and so, if we never meet again, let us think well of each other. Go, my boy! serve your king and your country!"

"I will do my best, Sir Miles, if only to merit your kindness."

"Stay a moment: you are intimate, I find, with young Mainwaring?"

"An old college friendship, Sir Miles."

"The army will not do for him, eh?"

"He is too clever for it, sir."

"Ah, he'd make a lawyer, I suppose—glib tongue enough! and can talk well,—and lie, if he's paid for it?"

"I don't know how lawyers regard those matters, Sir Miles; but if you don't make him a lawyer, I am sure you must leave him an honest man."

"Really and truly——"

"Upon my honour I think so."

"Good day to you, and good luck. You must catch the coach at the lodge; for, I see by the papers, that, in spite of all the talk about peace, they are raising regiments like wildfire."

With very different feelings from those with which he had entered the room, Ardworth quitted it. He hurried into his own chamber to thrust his clothes into his portmanteau, and, while thus employed, Mainwaring entered.

"Joy, my dear fellow! wish me joy! I am going to town—into the army—abroad—to be shot at, thank Heaven! That dear old gentleman!—just throw me that coat, will you?"

A very few more words sufficed to explain what had passed to Mainwaring: he sighed when his friend had finished: "I wish I were going with you!"

"Do you? Sir Miles has only got to write another letter to the Horse Guards; but no, you are meant to be something better than food for powder; and, besides, your Lucretia! Hang it, I am sorry I cannot stay to examine her as I had promised; but I have seen enough to know that she certainly loves you. Ah, when she changed flowers with you, you did not think I saw you—sly, was not I? Pshaw! she was only playing with Vernon! But still, do you know, Will, now that Sir Miles has spoken to me so, that I could have sobbed—'God bless you, my old boy!'—'pon my life, I could!—now, do you know, that I feel enraged with you for abetting that girl to deceive him?"

"I am enraged with myself: and——" Here a servant entered, and informed Mainwaring that he had been searching for him—Sir Miles requested to see him in his room. Mainwaring started like a culprit. "Never fear," whispered Ardworth; "he has no suspicion of you, I'm sure. Shake hands: when shall we meet again? Is it not odd, I, who am a Republican by theory, taking King George's pay to fight against the French? No use stopping now to moralise on such contradictions. John—Tom, what's your name—here, my man, here, throw that portmanteau on your shoulder, and come to the lodge." And so, full of health, hope, vivacity, and spirit, John Walter Ardworth departed on his career.

Meanwhile, Mainwaring slowly took his way to Sir Miles. As he approached the gallery, he met Lucretia, who was coming from her own room. "Sir Miles has sent for me," he said, meaningly. He had time for no more, for the valet was at the door of the gallery, waiting to usher him to his host.

"Ha! you will say not a word that can betray us; guard your looks, too!" whispered Lucretia, hurriedly; "afterwards, join me by the cedars." She passed on towards the staircase, and glanced at the large clock that was placed there. "Past eleven! Vernon is never up before twelve. I must see him before my uncle sends for me, as he will send if he suspects ——" She paused, went back to her room, rang for her maid, dressed as for walking, and said, carelessly, "If Sir Miles

wants me, I am gone to the rectory, and shall probably return by the village, so that I shall be back about one." Towards the rectory, indeed, Lucretia bent her way; but half-way there, turned back, and passing through the plantation at the rear of the house, awaited Mainwaring on the bench beneath the cedars. He was not long before he joined her. His face was sad and thoughtful; and when he seated himself by her side, it was with a weariness of spirit that alarmed her.

"Well," said she, fearfully, and she placed her hand on his.

"Oh, Lucretia," he exclaimed, as he pressed that hand with an emotion that came from other passions than love, "we, or rather *I*, have done great wrong. I have been leading you to betray your uncle's trust, to convert your gratitude to him into hypocrisy. I have been unworthy of myself. I am poor—I am humbly born; but, till I came here, I was rich and proud in honour. I am not so now. Lucretia, pardon me—pardon me! let the dream be over—we must not sin thus; for it is sin, and the worst of sin—treachery. We must part: forget me!"

"Forget you! never! never! never!" cried Lucretia, with suppressed, but most earnest vehemence—her breast heaving, her hands, as he dropped the one he held, clasped together, her eyes full of tears—transformed at once into softness, meekness, even while racked by passion and despair.

"Oh, William, say anything—reproach, chide, despise me, for mine is all the fault; say anything but that word 'part.' I have chosen you, I have sought you out, I have wooed you, if you will; be it so. I cling to you—you are my all—all that saves me from—from *myself*," she added, falteringly, and in a hollow voice. "Your love—you know not what it is to me! I scarcely knew it myself before. I feel what it is now, when you say '*part*.'"

Agitated and tortured, Mainwaring writhed at these burning words, bent his face low, and covered it with his hands.

He felt her clasp struggling to withdraw them, yielded, and saw her kneeling at his feet. His manhood, and his gratitude, and his heart, all moved by that sight in one so haughty, he opened his arms, and she fell on his breast.

"You will never say 'part' again, William!" she gasped, convulsively.

"But what are we to do?"

"Say, first, what has passed between you and my uncle."

"Little to relate; for I can repeat words, not tones and looks. Sir Miles spoke to me, at first kindly and encouragingly, about my prospects, said it was time that I should fix myself, added a few words with menacing emphasis against what he called 'idle dreams and desultory ambition,' and observing that I changed countenance—for I felt that I did—his manner became more cold and severe. Lucretia, if he has not detected our secret, he more than suspects my—my presumption. Finally, he said, drily, that I had better return home, consult with my father, and that if I preferred entering into the service of the Government to any mercantile profession, he thought he had sufficient interest to promote my views. But, clearly and distinctly, he left on my mind one impression—that my visits here are over."

"Did he allude to me—to Mr. Vernon?"

"Ah, Lucretia! do you know him so little—his delicacy, his pride?"

Lucretia was silent, and Mainwaring continued:—

"I felt that I was dismissed: I took my leave of your uncle; I came hither with the intention to say farewell for ever."

"Hush! hush! that thought is over! And you return to your father's; perhaps better so; it is but hope deferred: and, in your absence, I can the more easily allay all suspicion, if suspicion exist; but I must write to you; we must correspond. William, dear William, write often—write kindly; tell me, in every letter, that you love me—that you love only me—that you will be patient, and confide."

"Dear Lucretia," said Mainwaring tenderly, and moved by the pathos of her earnest and imploring voice: "but you forget; the bag is always brought first to Sir Miles; he will recognise my hand; and to whom can you trust your own letters?"

"True," replied Lucretia, despondingly; and there was a pause: suddenly she lifted her head, and cried, "but your

father's house is not far from this—not ten miles—we can find a spot at the remote end of the park, near the path through the great wood; there I can leave my letters; there I can find yours."

"But it must be seldom. If any of Sir Miles's servants see me, if——"

"Oh, William, William, this is not the language of love!"

"Forgive me—I think of you!"

"Love thinks of nothing but itself; it is tyrannical, absorbing—it forgets even the object loved; it feeds on danger—it strengthens by obstacles," said Lucretia, tossing her hair from her forehead, and with an expression of dark and wild power on her brow and in her eyes: "fear not for me, I am sufficient guard upon myself; even while I speak, I think; yes, I have thought of the very spot. You remember that hollow oak at the bottom of the dell, in which Guy St. John, the cavalier, is said to have hid himself from Fairfax's soldiers. Every Monday I will leave a letter in that hollow; every Tuesday you can search for it, and leave your own. This is but once a week; there is no risk here."

Mainwaring's conscience still smote him; but he had not the strength to resist the energy of Lucretia. The force of her character seized upon the weak part of his own—its gentleness, its fear of inflicting pain, its reluctance to say "no"—that simple cause of misery to the over timid. A few sentences more, full of courage, confidence, and passion, on the part of the woman, of constraint and yet of soothed and grateful affection on that of the man, and the affianced parted.

Mainwaring had already given orders to have his trunks sent to him at his father's; and, a hardy pedestrian by habit, he now struck across the park, passed the dell and the hollow tree, commonly called "Guy's Oak," and across woodland and fields golden with ripening corn, took his way to the town, in the centre of which square, solid, and imposing, stood the respectable residence of his bustling, active, electioneering father.

Lucretia's eye followed a form as fair as ever captivated maiden's glance, till it was out of sight; and then, as she emerged from the shade of the cedars into the more open space

of the garden, her usual thoughtful composure was restored to her steadfast countenance. On the terrace, she caught sight of Vernon, who had just quitted his own room, where he always breakfasted alone, and who was now languidly stretched on a bench, and basking in the sun. Like all who have abused life, Vernon was not the same man in the early part of the day. The spirits that rose to temperate heat the third hour after noon, and expanded into glow when the lights shone over gay carousers, at morning were flat and exhausted. With hollow eyes and that weary fall of the muscles of the cheeks, which betrays the votary of Bacchus—the convivial three-bottle man—Charley Vernon forced a smile, meant to be airy and impertinent, to his pale lips, as he rose with effort, and extended three fingers to his cousin.

"Where have you been hiding? catching bloom from the roses?—you have the prettiest shade of colour—just enough—not a hue too much. And there is Sir Miles's valet gone to the rectory, and the fat footman puffing away towards the village, and I, like a faithful warden, from my post at the castle, all looking out for the truant."

"But who wants me, cousin?" said Lucretia, with the full blaze of her rare and captivating smile.

"The knight of Laughton confessedly wants thee, O damsel!—the knight of the Bleeding Heart may want thee more—dare he own it?"

And with a hand that trembled a little, not with love—at least it trembled always a little before the Madeira at luncheon—he lifted hers to his lips.

"Compliments again, words—idle words!" said Lucretia, looking down bashfully.

"How can I convince thee of my sincerity, unless thou takest my life as its pledge, maid of Laughton?"

And very much tired of standing, Charley Vernon drew her gently to the bench, and seated himself by her side. Lucretia's eyes were still downcast, and she remained silent; Vernon suppressing a yawn, felt that he was bound to continue. There was nothing very formidable in Lucretia's manner.

"'Fore Gad!" thought he, "I suppose I must take the heiress

after all; the sooner 'tis over, the sooner I can get back to Brook Street."

"It is premature, my fair cousin," said he aloud—"premature, after less than a week's visit, and only some fourteen or fifteen hours' permitted friendship and intimacy, to say what is uppermost in my thoughts, but we spendthrifts are slow at nothing, not even at wooing. By sweet Venus, then, fair cousin, you look provokingly handsome! Sir Miles, your good uncle, is pleased to forgive all my follies and faults, upon one condition, that you will take on yourself the task to reform me. Will you, my fair cousin? Such as I am, you behold me! I am no sinner in the disguise of a saint! My fortune is spent—my health is not strong; but a young widow's is no mournful position. I am gay when I am well; good-tempered when ailing. I never betrayed a trust—can you trust me with yourself?"

This was a long speech, and Charley Vernon felt pleased that it was over. There was much in it that would have touched a heart even closed to him, and a little genuine emotion had given light to his eyes and colour to his cheek. Amidst all the ravages of dissipation, there was something interesting in his countenance, and manly in his tone and his gesture. But Lucretia was only sensible to one part of his confession—her uncle consented to his suit. This was all of which she desired to be assured, and against this she now sought to screen herself.

"Your candour, Mr. Vernon," she said, avoiding his eye, "deserves candour in me. I cannot affect to misunderstand you;—but you take me by surprise—I was so unprepared for this. Give me time—I must reflect."

"Reflection is dull work in the country; you can reflect more amusingly in town, my fair cousin."

"I will wait, then, till I find myself in town."

"Ah, you make me the happiest, the most grateful of men," cried Mr. Vernon, rising with a semi-genuflection, which seemed to imply, "Consider yourself knelt to," just as a courteous assailer, with a motion of the hand, implies, "Consider yourself horsewhipped."

Lucretia, who, with all her intellect, had no capacity for humour, recoiled and looked up in positive surprise.

"I do not understand you, Mr. Vernon," she said, with austere gravity.

"Allow me the bliss of flattering myself that you, at least, are understood," replied Charley Vernon, with imperturbable assurance. "You will wait to reflect till you are in town—that is to say, the day after our honeymoon, when you awake in Mayfair."

Before Lucretia could reply, she saw the indefatigable valet formally approaching, with the anticipated message that Sir Miles requested to see her. She replied hurriedly to this last, that she would be with her uncle immediately, and when he had again disappeared within the porch, she said, with a constrained effort at frankness—

"Mr. Vernon, if I have misunderstood your words, I think I do not mistake your character. You cannot wish to take advantage of my affection for my uncle, and the passive obedience I owe to him, to force me into a step—of which—of which—I have not yet sufficiently considered the results. If you really desire that my feelings should be consulted, that I should not—pardon me—consider myself sacrificed to the family pride of my guardian and the interests of my suitor——"

"Madam!" exclaimed Vernon, reddening

Pleased with the irritating effect her words had produced, Lucretia continued calmly, "If, in a word, I am to be a free agent in a choice on which my happiness depends, forbear to urge Sir Miles further at present—forbear to press your suit upon me. Give me the delay of a few months; I shall know how to appreciate your delicacy."

"Miss Clavering," answered Vernon, with a touch of the St. John haughtiness, "I am in despair that you should even think so grave an appeal to my honour necessary. I am well aware of your expectations and my poverty. And, believe me, I would rather rot in a prison than enrich myself by forcing your inclinations. You have but to say the word, and I will (as becomes me as a man and gentleman) screen you from all chance of Sir

Miles's displeasure, by taking it on myself to decline an honour of which I feel, indeed, very undeserving."

"But I have offended you," said Lucretia, softly, while she turned aside to conceal the glad light of her eyes,—"pardon me; and, to prove that you do so, give me your arm to my uncle's room."

Vernon, with rather more of Sir Miles's antiquated stiffness than his own rakish ease, offered his arm, with a profound reverence, to his cousin, and they took their way to the house. Not till they had passed up the stairs, and were even in the gallery, did further words pass between them. Then Vernon said—

"But what is your wish, Miss Clavering? On what footing shall I remain here?"

"Will you suffer me to dictate?" replied Lucretia, stopping short with well-feigned confusion, as if suddenly aware that the right to dictate gives the right to hope.

"Ah, consider me at least your slave!" whispered Vernon, as his eye, resting on the contour of that matchless neck, partially and advantageously turned from him, he began, with his constitutional admiration of the sex, to feel interested in a pursuit, that now seemed, after piquing, to flatter his self-love.

"Then I will use the privilege when we meet again," answered, Lucretia; and drawing her arm gently from his, she passed, on to her uncle, leaving Vernon midway in the gallery.

Those faded portraits looked down on her with that melancholy gloom which the effigies of our dead ancestors seem mysteriously to acquire. To noble and aspiring spirits, no homily to truth, and honour, and fair ambition is more eloquent, than the mute and melancholy canvas, from which our fathers, made, by death, our household gods, contemplate us still. They appear to confide to us the charge of their unblemished names. They speak to us from the grave, and, heard aright, the pride of family is the guardian angel of its heirs. But Lucretia, with her hard and scholastic mind, despised as the veriest weakness all the poetry that belongs to the sense of a pure descent. It was because she was proud as the proudest in herself, that she had nothing but contempt for the virtue, the

valour, or the wisdom of those that had gone before. So with a brain busy with guile and stratagem, she trod on, beneath the eyes of the simple and spotless Dead.

Vernon, thus left alone, mused a few moments on what had passed between himself and the heiress, and then slowly retracing his steps, his eye roved along the stately series of his line. "Faith!" he muttered, "if my boyhood had been passed in this old gallery, his Royal Highness would have lost a good fellow and hard drinker; and his Majesty would have had, perhaps, a more distinguished soldier—certainly a worthier subject. If I marry this lady, and we are blessed with a son, he shall walk through this gallery once a day before he is flogged into Latin!"

Lucretia's interview with her uncle was a masterpiece of art. What pity that such craft and subtlety were wasted in our little day, and on such petty objects; under the Medici, that spirit had gone far to the shaping of history. Sure, from her uncle's openness, that he would plunge at once into the subject for which she deemed she was summoned, she evinced no repugnance, when, tenderly kissing her, he asked, "If Charles Vernon had a chance of winning favour in her eyes?" She knew that she was safe in saying "No;" that her uncle would never force her inclinations:—safe so far as Vernon was concerned; but she desired more; she desired thoroughly to quench all suspicion that her heart was pre-occupied; entirely to remove from Sir Miles's thoughts the image of Mainwaring; and a denial of one suitor might quicken the baronet's eyes to the concealment of the other. Nor was this all: if Sir Miles was seriously bent upon seeing her settled in marriage before his death, the dismissal of Vernon might only expose her to the importunity of new candidates, more difficult to deal with. Vernon himself she could use as the shield against the arrows of a host. Therefore, when Sir Miles repeated his question, she answered, with much gentleness and seeming modest sense, that "Mr. Vernon had much that must prepossess in his favour; that in addition to his own advantages he had one, the highest in her eyes, her uncle's sanction and approval. But," and she hesitated with becoming and natural diffidence, "were not his

habits unfixed and roving? So it was said; she knew not herself—she would trust her happiness to her uncle. But if so, and if Mr. Vernon were really disposed to change, would it not be prudent to try him—try him where there was temptation,—not in the repose of Laughton, but amidst his own haunts of London? Sir Miles had friends who would honestly inform him of the result. She did but suggest this: she was too ready to leave all to her dear guardian's acuteness and experience."

Melted by her docility, and in high approval of the prudence which betokened a more rational judgment than he himself had evinced, the good old man clasped her to his breast, and shed tears as he praised and thanked her—she had decided, as she always did, for the best,—Heaven forbid that she should be wasted on an incorrigible man of pleasure! "And," said the frank-hearted gentleman, unable long to keep any thought concealed,—"and to think that I could have wronged you for a moment, my own noble child!—that I could have been dolt enough to suppose that the good looks of that boy Mainwaring might have caused you to forget what—but you change colour!" —for with all her dissimulation, Lucretia loved too ardently not to shrink at that name thus suddenly pronounced. "Oh," continued the baronet, drawing her still nearer towards him, while with one hand he put back her face, that he might read its expression the more closely—"oh, if it had been so—if it be so, I will pity, not blame you, for my neglect was the fault; pity you, for I have known a similar struggle; admire you in pity, for you have the spirit of your ancestors, and you will conquer the weakness. Speak! have I touched on the truth? Speak without fear, child!—you have no mother; but in age a man sometimes gets a mother's heart."

Startled and alarmed as the lark when the step nears its nest, Lucretia summoned all the dark wile of her nature to mislead the intruder. "No, uncle, no; I am not so unworthy. You misconceived my emotion."

"Ah, you know that he has had the presumption to love you —the puppy! and you feel the compassion you women always feel for such offenders? Is that it?"

Rapidly Lucretia considered if it would be wise to leave that impression on his mind; on one hand, it might account for a moment's agitation; and if Mainwaring were detected hovering near the domain, in the exchange of their correspondence, it might appear but the idle, if hopeless, romance of youth, which haunts the mere home of its object—but, no; on the other hand, it left his banishment absolute and confirmed. Her resolution was taken with a promptitude that made her pause not perceptible.

"No, my dear uncle," she said, so cheerfully, that it removed all doubt from the mind of her listener; "but Monsieur Dalibard has rallied me on the subject, and I was so angry with him, that when you touched on it I thought more of my quarrel with him than of poor timid Mr. Mainwaring himself. Come now, own it, dear sir! Monsieur Dalibard has instilled this strange fancy into your head?"

"No, 'Slife: if he had taken such a liberty, I should have lost my librarian. No, I assure you, it was rather Vernon: you know true love is jealous."

"Vernon!" thought Lucretia; "he must go, and at once." Sliding from her uncle's arms to the stool at his feet, she then led the conversation more familiarly back into the channel it had lost; and when, at last, she escaped, it was with the understanding that, without promise or compromise, Mr. Vernon should return to London at once, and be put upon the ordeal, through which she felt assured it was little likely he should pass with success.

CHAPTER IV.

GUY'S OAK.

THREE weeks afterwards, the life at Laughton seemed restored to the cheerful and somewhat monotonous tranquillity of its course, before chafed and disturbed by the recent interruptions to the stream. Vernon had departed satisfied

with the justice of the trial imposed on him, and far too high-spirited to seek to extort from niece or uncle any engagement beyond that which, to a nice sense of honour, the trial itself imposed. His memory and his heart were still faithful to Mary; but his senses, his fancy, his vanity, were a little involved in his success with the heiress. Though so free from all mercenary meanness, Mr. Vernon was still enough man of the world to be sensible of the advantages of the alliance which had first been pressed on him by Sir Miles; and from which Lucretia herself appeared not to be averse. The season of London was over, but there was always a set, and that set the one in which Charley Vernon principally moved, who found town fuller than the country. Besides, he went occasionally to Brighton, which was then to England what Baiæ was to Rome. The Prince was holding gay court at the Pavilion, and that was the atmosphere which Vernon was habituated to breathe. He was no parasite of royalty: he had that strong personal affection to the Prince which it is often the good fortune of royalty to attract. Nothing is less founded than the complaint which poets put into the lips of princes, that they have no friends; it is, at least, their own perverse fault if that be the case—a little amiability, a little of frank kindness goes so far when it emanates from the rays of a crown! But Vernon was stronger than Lucretia deemed him—once contemplating the prospect of a union which was to consign to his charge the happiness of another, and feeling all that he should owe in such a marriage to the confidence both of niece and uncle, he evinced steadier principles than he had ever made manifest, when he had only his own fortune to mar, and his own happiness to trifle with. He joined his old companions; but he kept aloof from their more dissipated pursuits. Beyond what was then thought the venial error of too devout libations to Bacchus, Charley Vernon seemed reformed.

Ardworth had joined a regiment which had departed for the field of action. Mainwaring was still with his father, and had not yet announced to Sir Miles any wish or project for the future.

Olivier Dalibard, as before, passed his mornings alone in

his chamber—his noon and his evenings with Sir Miles. He avoided all private conferences with Lucretia. She did not provoke them. Young Gabriel amused himself in copying Sir Miles's pictures, sketching from Nature, scribbling in his room, prose or verse, no matter which (he never showed his lucubrations), pinching the dogs when he could catch them alone, shooting the cats, if they appeared in the plantation, on pretence of love for the young pheasants, sauntering into the cottages, where he was a favourite because of his good looks, but where he always contrived to leave the trace of his visits in disorder and mischief, upsetting the tea-kettle and scalding the children, or, what he loved dearly, setting two gossips by the ears. But these occupations were over by the hour Lucretia left her apartment. From that time he never left her out of view: and, when encouraged to join her at his usual privileged times, whether in the gardens at sunset or in her evening niche in the drawing-room, he was sleek silken, and caressing as Cupid, after plaguing the Nymphs, at the feet of Psyche. These two strange persons had indeed apparently that sort of sentimental familiarity which is sometimes seen between a fair boy and a girl much older than himself; but the attraction that drew them together was an indefinable instinct of their similarity in many traits of their several characters,—the whelp leopard sported fearlessly around the she-panther. Before Olivier's midnight conference with his son, Gabriel had drawn close and closer to Lucretia, as an ally against his father; for that father he cherished feelings which, beneath the most docile obedience, concealed horror and hate, and something of the ferocity of revenge. And if young Varney loved any one on earth except himself, it was Lucretia Clavering. She had administered to his ruling passions, which were for effect and display; she had devised the dress which set off to the utmost his exterior, and gave it that picturesque and artistic appearance which he had sighed for in his study of the portraits of Titian and Vandyke. She supplied him (for in money she was generous) with enough to gratify and forestall every boyish caprice, and this liberality now turned against her, for it had increased into a settled vice his natural taste for extravagance,

and made all other considerations subordinate to that of feeding his cupidity. She praised his drawings, which, though self-taught, were indeed extraordinary, predicted his fame as an artist, lifted him into consequence amongst the guests by her notice and eulogies; and what, perhaps, won him more than all, he felt that it was to her—to Dalibard's desire to conceal before her his more cruel propensities—that he owed his father's change from the most refined severity to the most paternal gentleness.

And thus he had repaid her, as she expected, by a devotion which she trusted to employ against her tutor himself, should the baffled aspirant become the scheming rival and the secret foe. But now, thoroughly aware of the gravity of his father's objects, seeing before him the chance of a settled establishment at Laughton, a positive and influential connection with Lucretia; and on the other hand a return to the poverty he recalled with disgust, and the terrors of his father's solitary malice and revenge, he entered fully into Dalibard's sombre plans, and without scruple or remorse, would have abetted any harm to his benefactress. Thus craft doomed to have accomplices in craft, resembles the spider, whose web, spread indeed for the fly, attracts the fellow-spider that shall thrust it forth, and profit by the meshes it has woven for a victim, to surrender to a master.

Already young Varney, set quietly and ceaselessly to spy every movement of Lucretia's, had reported to his father two visits to the most retired part of the park; but he had not yet ventured near enough to discover the exact spot, and his very watch on Lucretia had prevented the detection of Mainwaring himself in his stealthy exchange of correspondence. Dalibard bade him continue his watch, without hinting at his ulterior intentions, for, indeed, in these he was not decided. Even should he discover any communication between Lucretia and Mainwaring, how reveal it to Sir Miles without for ever precluding himself from the chance of profiting by the betrayal? Could Lucretia ever forgive the injury, and could she fail to detect the hand that inflicted it? His only hope was in the removal of Mainwaring from his path by other agencies than

his own, and (by an appearance of generosity and self-abandonment, in keeping her secret and submitting to his fate) he trusted to regain the confidence she now withheld from him, and use it to his advantage when the time came to defend himself from Vernon. For he had learned from Sir Miles the passive understanding with respect to that candidate for her hand; and he felt assured that had Mainwaring never existed, could he cease to exist for her hopes, Lucretia, despite her dissimulation, would succumb to one she feared but respected, rather than one she evidently trifled with and despised.

"But the course to be taken must be adopted after the evidence is collected," thought the subtle schemer, and he tranquilly continued his chess with the baronet.

Before, however, Gabriel could make any further discoveries, an event occurred which excited very different emotions amongst those it more immediately interested.

Sir Miles had, during the last twelve months, been visited by two seizures, seemingly of an apoplectic character. Whether they were apoplexy, or the less alarming attacks that arise from some more gentle congestion, occasioned by free living and indolent habits, was matter of doubt with his physician —not a very skilful, though a very formal man. Country doctors were not then the same able, educated, and scientific class that they are now rapidly becoming. Sir Miles himself so stoutly and so eagerly repudiated the least hint of the more unfavourable interpretation, that the doctor, if not convinced by his patient, was awed from expressing plainly a contrary opinion. There are certain persons who will dismiss their physician if he tells them the truth: Sir Miles was one of them.

In his character there was a weakness not uncommon to the proud. He did not fear death, but he shrank from the thought that others should calculate on his dying. He was fond of his power, though he exercised it gently: he knew that the power of wealth and station is enfeebled in proportion as its dependants can foresee the date of its transfer. He dreaded, too, the comments which are always made on those visited by his peculiar disease: "Poor Sir Miles! an apoplectic fit! his intellect must

be very much shaken—he revoked at whist last night—memory sadly impaired!" This may be a pitiable foible; but heroes and statesmen have had it most: pardon it in the proud old man! He enjoined the physician to state throughout the house and the neighbourhood, that the attacks were wholly innocent and unimportant. The physician did so, and was generally believed; for Sir Miles seemed as lively and as vigorous after them as before. Two persons alone were not deceived—Dalibard and Lucretia. The first, at an earlier part of his life, had studied pathology with the profound research and ingenious application which he brought to bear upon all he undertook. He whispered from the first to Lucretia—

"Unless your uncle changes his habits, takes exercise, and forbears wine and the table, his days are numbered.

And when this intelligence was first conveyed to her, before she had become acquainted with Mainwaring, Lucretia felt the shock of a grief sudden and sincere. We have seen how these better sentiments changed as human life became an obstacle in her way. In her character, what phrenologists call "destructiveness," in the comprehensive sense of the word, was superlatively developed. She had not actual cruelty; she was not bloodthirsty: those vices belong to a different cast of character. She was rather deliberately and intellectually unsparing—a goal was before her; she must march to it; all in the way were but hostile impediments. At first, however, Sir Miles was not in the way, except to fortune, and for that, as avarice was not her leading vice, she could well wait; therefore, at this hint of the Provençal's, she ventured to urge her uncle to abstinence and exercise, but Sir Miles was touchy on the subject: he feared the interpretations which great change of habits might suggest, the memory of the fearful warning died away, and he felt as well as before, for, save an old rheumatic gout (which had long since left him, with no other apparent evil but a lameness in the joints, that rendered exercise unwelcome and painful), he possessed one of those comfortable, and often treacherous constitutions, which evince no displeasure at irregularities, and bear all liberties with philosophical composure. Accordingly he would have his own way; and he contrived to

coax or to force his doctor into an authority on his side: wine was necessary to his constitution ; much exercise was a dangerous fatigue. The second attack, following four months after the first, was less alarming, and Sir Miles fancied it concealed even from his niece ; but three nights after his recovery, the old baronet sat musing alone for some time in his own room, before he retired to rest. Then he rose, opened his desk, and read his will attentively, locked it up with a slight sigh, and took down his Bible. The next morning he despatched the letters which summoned Ardworth and Vernon to his house ; and, as he quitted his room, his look lingered with melancholy fondness upon the portraits in the gallery. No one was by the old man to interpret these slight signs, in which lay a world of meaning.

A few weeks after Vernon had left the house, and in the midst of restored tranquillity we have described, it so happened that Sir Miles's physician, after dining at the hall, had been summoned to attend one of the children at the neighbouring rectory, and there he spent the night. A little before daybreak his slumbers were disturbed ; he was recalled in all haste to Laughton Hall. For the third time, he found Sir Miles speechless. Dalibard was by his bedside. Lucretia had not been made aware of the seizure; for Sir Miles had previously told his valet (who of late slept in the same room) never to alarm Miss Clavering if he was taken ill. The doctor was about to apply his usual remedies ; but when he drew forth his lancet, Dalibard placed his hand on the physician's arm—

"Not *this* time," he said slowly, and with emphasis ; "it will be his death."

"Pooh, sir!" said the doctor, disdainfully.

"Do so, then! bleed him, and take the responsibility. I have studied medicine—I know these symptoms. In this case the apoplexy may spare—the lancet kills."

The physician drew back dismayed and doubtful.

"What would you do, then?"

"Wait three minutes longer the effect of the cataplasms I have applied. If they fail——"

"Ay, then?"

"A chill bath, and vigorous friction."

"Sir, I will never permit it."

"Then murder your patient your own way."

All this while Sir Miles lay senseless, his eyes wide open, his teeth locked. The doctor drew near, looked at the lancet, and said irresolutely—

"Your practice is new to me; but if you have studied medicine, that's another matter. Will you guarantee the success of your plan?"

"Yes."

"Mind, I wash my hands of it; I take Mr. Jones to witness:" and he appealed to the valet.

"Call up the footmen and lift your master," said Dalibard; and the doctor, glancing round, saw that a bath, filled some seven or eight inches deep with water, stood already prepared in the room. Perplexed and irresolute, he offered no obstacle to Dalibard's movements. The body, seemingly lifeless, was placed in the bath; and the servants, under Dalibard's directions, applied vigorous and incessant friction. Several minutes elapsed before any favourable symptom took place; at length Sir Miles heaved a deep sigh, and the eyes moved—a minute or two more, and the teeth chattered; the blood, set in motion, appeared on the surface of the skin: life ebbed back; the danger was passed: the dark foe driven from the citadel. Sir Miles spoke audibly, though incoherently, as he was taken back to his bed, warmly covered up, the lights removed, noise forbidden, and Dalibard and the doctor remained in silence by the bedside.

"Rich man," thought Dalibard, "thine hour is not yet come: thy wealth must not pass to the boy Mainwaring."

Sir Miles's recovery, under the care of Dalibard, who now had his own way, was as rapid and complete as before. Lucretia, when she heard, the next morning, of the attack, felt, we dare not say, a guilty joy, but a terrible and feverish agitation. Sir Miles himself, informed by his valet of Dalibard's wrestle with the doctor, felt a profound gratitude and reverent wonder for the simple means to which he probably owed his restoration; and he listened, with a docility which Dalibard was not prepared to

expect, to his learned secretary's urgent admonitions as to the life he must lead, if he desired to live at all. Convinced, at last, that wine and good cheer had not blockaded out the enemy, and having to do, in Olivier Dalibard, with a very different temper from the doctor's, he assented with a tolerable grace to the trial of a strict regimen and to daily exercise in the open air. Dalibard now became constantly with him—the increase of his influence was as natural as it was apparent. Lucretia trembled; she divined a danger in his power, now separate from her own, and which threatened to be independent of it. She became abstracted and uneasy — jealousy of the Provençal possessed her. She began to meditate schemes for his downfall. At this time, Sir Miles received the following letter from Mr. Fielden :—

"SOUTHAMPTON, *August 20th*, 1801.

"DEAR SIR MILES,—You will remember that I informed you when I arrived at Southampton, with my dear young charge; and Susan has twice written to her sister, implying the request which she lacked the courage, seeing that she is timid, expressly to urge, that Miss Clavering might again be permitted to visit her. Miss Clavering has answered, as might be expected from the propinquity of the relationship; but she has perhaps the same fears of offending you that actuate her sister But now, since the worthy clergyman, who had undertaken my parochial duties, has found the air insalubrious, and prays me not to enforce the engagement by which we had exchanged our several charges for the space of a calendar year, I am reluctantly compelled to return home—my dear wife, thank Heaven, being already restored to health, which is an unspeakable mercy; and I am sure I cannot be sufficiently grateful to Providence which has not only provided me with a liberal independence of more than two hundred pounds a year, but the best of wives and the most dutiful of children—possessions that I venture to call 'the riches of the heart.' Now, I pray you, my dear Sir Miles, to gratify, these two deserving young persons, and to suffer Miss Lucretia incontinently to visit her sister. Counting on your consent, thus boldly demanded, I have already prepared an apartment for Miss Clavering; and Susan is busy

in what, though I do not know much of such feminine matters, the whole house declares to be a most beautiful and fanciful toilet cover, with roses and forget-me-nots cut out of muslin, and two large silk tassels, which cost her three shillings and fourpence. I cannot conclude, without thanking you from my heart for your noble kindness to young Ardworth. He is so full of ardour and spirit, that I remember poor lad, when I left him, as I thought, hard at work on that well known problem of Euclid vulgarly called the Asses' Bridge—I found him describing a figure of 8 on the village pond, which was only just frozen over! Poor lad! Heaven will take care of him, I know, as it does of all who take no care of themselves. Ah, Sir Miles, if you could but see Susan—such a nurse, too, in illness!

"I have the honour to be,

"Sir Miles,

"Your most humble, poor servant, to command,

"MATTHEW FIELDEN."

Sir Miles put this letter in his niece's hand, and said, kindly, "Why not have gone to see your sister before? I should not have been angry. Go, my child, as soon as you like: to-morrow is Sunday—no travelling that day—but the next, the carriage shall be at your order."

Lucretia hesitated a moment. To leave Dalibard in sole possession of the field, even for a few days, was a thought of alarm; but what evil could he do in that time? And her pulse beat quickly!—Mainwaring could come to Southampton!—she should see him again, after more than six weeks' absence! She had so much to relate and to hear—she fancied his last letter had been colder and shorter—she yearned to hear him say with his own lips that he "loved her still!" This idea banished or prevailed over all others. She thanked her uncle cheerfully and gaily, and the journey was settled.

"Be at watch early on Monday," said Olivier to his son.

Monday came—the baronet had ordered the carriage to be at the door at ten. A little before eight, Lucretia stole out, and took her way to Guy's Oak. Gabriel had placed himself in readiness; he had climbed a tree at the bottom of the park

(near the place where hitherto he had lost sight of her); she passed under it,—on through a dark grove of pollard oaks. When she was at a sufficient distance, the boy dropped from his perch: with the stealth of an Indian, he crept on her trace, following from tree to tree, always sheltered, always watchful; he saw her pause at the dell, and look round—she descended into the hollow; he slunk though the fern—he gained the marge of the dell, and looked down—she was lost to his sight. At length, to his surprise, he saw the gleam of her robe emerge from the hollow of a tree—her head stooped as she came through the aperture; he had time to shrink back amongst the fern; she passed on hurriedly, the same way she had taken, back to the house; then into the dell crept the boy. Guy's Oak, vast and venerable, with gnarled green boughs below, and sere branches above, that told that its day of fall was decreed at last—rose high from the abyss of the hollow—high and far-seen amidst the trees that stood on the vantage-ground above—even as a great name soars the loftier when it springs from the grave. A dark and irregular fissure gave entrance to the heart of the oak—the boy glided in and looked round—he saw nothing—yet something there must be. The rays of the early sun did not penetrate into the hollow, it was as dim as a cave. He felt slowly in every crevice, and a startled moth or two flew out. It was not for moths that the girl had come to Guy's Oak! He drew back, at last, in despair! as he did so, he heard a low sound close at hand, a low, murmuring, angry sound, like a hiss; he looked round, and through the dark, two burning eyes fixed his own—he had startled a snake from its bed. He drew out in time, as the reptile sprang; but now his task, search, and object, were forgotten. With the versatility of a child, his thoughts were all on the enemy he had provoked. That zest of prey which is inherent in man's breast, which makes him love the sport and the chase, and maddens boyhood and age with the passion for slaughter, leapt up within him; anything of danger, and contest, and excitement, gave Gabriel Varney a strange fever of pleasure. He sprang up the sides of the dell, climbed the park pales on which it bordered, was in the wood where the young shoots

rose green and strong from the underwood. To cut a staff for the strife, to descend again into the dell, creep again through the fissure, look round for those vengeful eyes, was quick done as the joyous play of the impulse. The poor snake had slid down in content and fancied security; its young, perhaps, were not far off; its wrath had been the instinct Nature gives to the mother. It hath done thee no harm yet, boy; leave it in peace! The young hunter had no ear to such whisper of prudence or mercy. Dim and blind in the fissure, he struck the ground and the tree with his stick, shouted out, bade the eyes gleam, and defied them, whether or not the reptile had spent its ire in the first fruitless spring, and this unlooked-for return of the intruder rather daunted than exasperated, we leave those better versed in natural history to conjecture; but, instead of obeying the challenge and courting the contest, it glided by the sides of the oak, close to the very feet of its foe, and, emerging into the light, dragged its grey coils through the grass; but its hiss still betrayed it. Gabriel sprang through the fissure, and struck at the craven, insulting it with a laugh of scorn as he struck. Suddenly it halted, suddenly reared its crest; the throat swelled with venom, the tongue darted out, and again, green as emeralds, glared the spite of its eyes. No fear felt Gabriel Varney; his arm was averted; he gazed spelled and admiringly with the eye of an artist. Had he had pencil and tablet at that moment, he would have dropped his weapon for the sketch, though the snake had been as deadly as the viper of Sumatra. The sight sank into his memory, to be reproduced often by the wild, morbid fancies of his hand. Scarce a moment, however, had he for the gaze; the reptile sprang, and fell, baffled and bruised by the involuntary blow of its enemy. As it writhed on the grass, how its colours came out—how graceful were the movements of its pain! And still the boy gazed, till the eye was sated, and the cruelty returned. A blow—a second—a third—all the beauty is gone—shapeless, and clotted with gore, that elegant head; mangled and dissevered the airy spires of that delicate shape, which had glanced in its circling involutions, free and winding

as a poet's thought through his verse. The boy trampled the quivering relics into the sod, with a fierce animal joy of conquest, and turned once more towards the hollow, for a last almost hopeless survey. Lo, his object was found! In his search for the snake, either his staff, or his foot, had disturbed a layer of moss in the corner; the faint ray, ere he entered the hollow, gleamed upon something white. He emerged from the cavity with a letter in his hand: he read the address, thrust it into his bosom, and as stealthily, but more rapidly, than he had come, took his way to his father.

CHAPTER V.

HOUSEHOLD TREASON.

THE Provençal took the letter from his son's hand, and looked at him with an approbation half-complacent, half-ironical. "*Mon fils!*" said he, patting the boy's head gently; "why should we not be friends? We want each other; we have the strong world to fight against."

"Not if you are master of this place."

"Well answered: no; then we shall have the strong world on our side, and shall have only rogues and the poor to make war upon." Then, with a quiet gesture, he dismissed his son, and gazed slowly on the letter. His pulse, which was usually low, quickened, and his lips were tightly compressed; he shrank from the contents with a jealous pang; as a light quivers strugglingly in a noxious vault, love descended into that hideous breast, gleamed upon dreary horrors, and warred with the noxious atmosphere; but it shone still. To this dangerous man, every art that gives power to the household traitor was familiar: he had no fear that the violated seals should betray the fraud which gave the contents to the eye that, at length, steadily fell upon the following lines:

"Dearest, and ever dearest,—

"Where art thou at this moment? what are thy thoughts?

are they upon me? I write this at the dead of night. I picture you to myself as my hand glides over the paper. I think I see you, as you look on these words, and envy them the gaze of those dark eyes. Press your lips to the paper. Do you feel the kiss that I leave there? Well, well! it will not be for long now that we shall be divided. Oh, what joy, when I think that I am about to see you. Two days more, at most three, and we shall meet—shall we not? I am going to see my sister. I subjoin my address. Come, come, come; I thirst to see you once more. And I did well to say, 'Wait, and be patient;' we shall not wait long: before the year is out I shall be free. My uncle has had another and more deadly attack. I see its trace in his face, in his step, in his whole form and bearing. The only obstacle between us is fading away Can I grieve when I think it?—grieve when life with you spreads smiling beyond the old man's grave? And why should age, that has survived all passion, stand with its chilling frown, and the miserable prejudices the world has not conquered, but strengthened into a creed—why should age stand between youth and youth? I feel your mild eyes rebuke me as I write. But chide me not that on earth I see only you. And it will be mine to give you wealth and rank!—mine to see the homage of my own heart reflected from the crowd who bow not to the statue, but the pedestal. Oh, how I shall enjoy your revenge upon the proud!—for I have drawn no pastoral scenes in my picture of the future. No; I see you leading senates, and duping fools. I shall be by your side, your partner, step after step, as you mount the height, for I am ambitious, you know, William; and not less, because I love: rather ten thousand times more so. I would not have you born great and noble, for what then could we look to? what use all my schemes, and my plans, and aspirings? Fortune, accident would have taken from us the great zest of life, which is desire.

"When I see you, I shall tell you that I have some fears of Olivier Dalibard; he has evidently some wily project in view. He, who never interfered before with the blundering physician, now thrusts him aside, affects to have saved the old man,

attends him always. Dares he think to win an influence, to turn against me?—against us? Happily, when I shall come back, my uncle will probably be restored to the false strength which deceives him; he will have less need of Dalibard, and then—then let the Frenchman beware! I have already a plot to turn his schemes to his own banishment. Come to Southampton, then, as soon as you can—perhaps the day you receive this,—on Wednesday, at farthest. Your last letter implies blame of my policy with respect to Vernon. Again I say, it is necessary to amuse my uncle to the last. Before Vernon can advance a claim, there will be weeping at Laughton. I shall weep, too, perhaps; but there will be joy in those tears, as well as sorrow; for then, when I clasp thy hand, I can murmur, 'It is mine at last, and for ever!'

"Adieu! no, not adieu—to our meeting, my lover, my beloved!—thy LUCRETIA!"

An hour after Miss Clavering had departed on her visit Dalibard returned the letter to his son, the seal seemingly unbroken, and bade him replace it in the hollow of the tree, but sufficiently in sight to betray itself to the first that entered. He then communicated the plan he had formed for its detection—a plan which would prevent Lucretia ever suspecting the agency of his son or himself and this done, he joined Sir Miles in the gallery. Hitherto, in addition to his other apprehensions in revealing to the baronet Lucretia's clandestine intimacy with Mainwaring, Dalibard had shrunk from the thought that the disclosure would lose her the heritage which had first tempted his avarice or ambition; but now his jealous and his vindictive passions were aroused, and his whole plan of strategy was changed. He must crush Lucretia, or she would crush him, as her threats declared. To ruin her in Sir Miles's eyes, to expel her from his house, might not, after all, weaken his own position, even with regard to power over herself. If he remained firmly established at Laughton, he could affect intercession,—he could delay, at least, any precipitate union with Mainwaring, by practising on the ambition which he still saw at work beneath her love; he might become a necessary ally, and then—why, then

—his ironical smile glanced across his lips. But beyond this his quick eye saw fair prospects to self-interest—Lucretia banished; the heritage not hers; the will to be altered; Dalibard esteemed indispensable to the life of the baronet. Come, there was hope here,—not for the heritage, indeed, but at least for a munificent bequest.

At noon, some visitors, bringing strangers from London whom Sir Miles had invited to see the house (which was one of the lions of the neighbourhood, though not professedly a show-place), were expected. Aware of this, Dalibard prayed the baronet to rest quiet till his company arrived, and then he said, carelessly,—

"It will be a healthful diversion to your spirits to accompany them a little in the park,—you can go in your garden-chair,—you will have new companions to talk with by the way; and it is always warm and sunny at the slope of the hill, towards the bottom of the park."

Sir Miles assented cheerfully; the guests came, strolled over the house, admired the pictures, and the armour, and the hall, and the staircase, paid due respect to the substantial old-fashioned luncheon, and then, refreshed, and in great good-humour, acquiesced in Sir Miles's proposition to saunter through the park.

The poor baronet was more lively than usual. The younger people clustered gaily round his chair (which was wheeled by his valet), smiling at his jests and charmed with his courteous high breeding. A little in the rear walked Gabriel, paying special attention to the prettiest and merriest girl of the company, who was a great favourite with Sir Miles, perhaps for those reasons.

"What a delightful old gentleman!" said the young lady. "How I envy Miss Clavering such an uncle!"

"Ah! but you are a little out of favour to-day, I can tell you," said Gabriel, laughingly; "you were close by Sir Miles when we went through the picture-gallery, and you never asked him the history of the old knight in the buff doublet and blue sash."

"Dear me—what of that?"

"Why, that was brave Colonel Guy St. John, the cavalier, the pride and boast of Sir Miles; you know his weakness He looked so displeased when you said, 'What a droll-looking figure!' I was on thorns for you!"

"What a pity! I would not offend dear Sir Miles for the world."

"Well, it's easy to make it up with him. Go, and tell him that he must take you to see Guy's Oak, in the dell; that you have heard so much about it; and when you get him on his hobby, it is hard if you can't make your peace."

"Oh! I'll certainly do it, Master Varney;" and the young lady lost no time in obeying the hint. Gabriel had set other tongues on the same cry, so that there was a general exclamation, when the girl named the subject—"Oh, Guy's Oak, by all means!"

Much pleased with the enthusiasm this memorial of his pet ancestor produced. Sir Miles led the way to the dell, and, pausing as he reached the verge, said,—

"I fear I cannot do you the honours; it is too steep for my chair to descend safely."

Gabriel whispered the fair companion whose side he still kept to.

"Now, my dear Sir Miles," cried the girl, "I positively won't stir without you; I am sure we could get down the chair without a jolt. Look there, how nicely the ground slopes! Jane, Lucy, my dears, let us take charge of Sir Miles. Now, then."

The gallant old gentleman would have marched to the breach in such guidance; he kissed the fair hands that lay so temptingly on his chair, and then rising with some difficulty, said,—

"No, my dears, you have made me so young again, that I think I can walk down the steep with the best of you."

So, leaning partly on his valet, and by the help of the hands extended to him, step after step, Sir Miles, with well-disguised effort, reached the huge roots of the oak.

"The hollow then was much smaller," said he, "so he was not so easily detected as a man would be now: the

damned crop-ears — I beg pardon, my dears—the rascally rebels poked their swords through the fissure, and two went, one through his jerkin, one through his arm; but he took care not to swear at the liberty, and they went away, not suspecting hm."

While thus speaking, the young people were already playfully struggling which should first enter the oak. Two got precedence, and went in and out, one after the other. Gabriel breathed hard. "The blind owlets!" thought he, "and I put the letter where a mole would have seen it!"

"You know the spell when you enter an oak-tree where the fairies have been," he whispered to the fair object of his notice. "You must turn round three times, look carefully on the ground, and you will see the face you love best. If I was but a little older, how I should pray!——"

"Nonsense!" said the girl, blushing, as she now slid through the crowd, and went timidly in; presently she uttered a little exclamation.

The gallant Sir Miles stooped down to see what was the matter, and offering his hand as she came out, was startled to see her holding a letter.

"Only think what I have found!" said the girl. "What a strange place for a post-office! Bless me! it is directed to Mr. Mainwaring!"

"Mr. Mainwaring!" cried three or four voices; but the baronet's was mute His eye recognised Lucretia's hand, his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth; the blood surged, like a sea, in his temples; his face became purple. Suddenly Gabriel, peeping over the girl's shoulder, snatched away the letter.

"It is my letter—it is mine! What a shame in Mainwaring not to have come for it as he promised!"

Sir Miles looked round and breathed more freely.

"Yours, Master Varney!" said the young lady, astonished. "What can make your letters to Mr. Mainwaring such a secret?"

"Oh! you'll laugh at me; but—— but—— I wrote a poem on Guy's Oak, and Mr. Mainwaring promised to get it into the County paper for me; and as he was to pass close by the

park pales, through the wood yonder, on his way to D—— last Saturday, we agreed that I should leave it here; but he has forgotten his promise, I see."

Sir Miles grasped the boy's arm with a convulsive pressure of gratitude. There was a general cry for Gabriel to read his poem on the spot; but the boy looked sheepish, and hung down his head, and seemed rather more disposed to cry than to recite. Sir Miles, with an effort at simulation that all his long practice of the world never could have nerved him to, unexcited by a motive less strong than the honour of his blood and house, came to the relief of the young wit that had just come to his own.

"Nay," he said, almost calmly, "I know our young poet is too shy to oblige you. I will take charge of your verses, Master Gabriel;" and, with a grave air of command, he took the letter from the boy, and placed it in his pocket.

The return to the house was less gay than the visit to the oak. The baronet himself made a feverish effort to appear blithe and *débonnaire* as before; but it was not successful. Fortunately, the carriages were all at the door as they reached the house, and luncheon being over, nothing delayed the parting compliments of the guests. As the last carriage drove away, Sir Miles beckoned to Gabriel, and bade him follow him into his room.

When there he dismissed his valet and said—

"You know, then, who wrote this letter. Have you been in the secret of the correspondence? Speak the truth, my dear boy, it shall cost you nothing."

"Oh, Sir Miles!" cried Gabriel, earnestly, "I know nothing whatever beyond this—that I saw the hand of my dear, kind Miss Lucretia; that I felt, I hardly knew why, that both you and she would not have those people discover it, which they would if the letter had been circulated from one to the other, for some one would have known the hand as well as myself, and therefore I spoke, without thinking, the first thing that came into my head."

"You—you have obliged me and my niece, sir," said the baronet, tremulously; and then with a forced and sickly

smile, he added "some foolish vagary of Lucretia's, I suppose; I must scold her for it. Say nothing about it, however, to any one."

"Oh no, sir!"

"Good-bye, my dear Gabriel!"

"And that boy saved the honour of my niece's name—my mother's grandchild! Oh, God! this is bitter!—in my old age too!"

He bowed his head over his hands, and tears forced themselves through his fingers. He was long before he had courage to read the letter, though he little foreboded all the shock that it would give him. It was the first letter, not destined to himself, of which he had ever broken the seal. Even that recollection made the honourable old man pause; but his duty was plain and evident, as head of the house, and guardian to his niece. Thrice he wiped his spectacles; still they were dim, still the tears would come. He rose tremblingly, walked to the window, and saw the stately deer grouped in the distance, saw the church spire, that rose above the burial vault of his ancestors, and his heart sank deeper and deeper, as he muttered—"Vain pride! pride!" Then he crept to the door, and locked it, and at last, seating himself firmly, as a wounded man to some terrible operation, he read the letter.

Heaven support thee, old man! thou hast to pass through the bitterest trial which honour and affection can undergo;—household treason! When the wife lifts high the blushless front, and brazens out her guilt; when the child, with loud voice, throws off all control, and makes boast of disobedience, man revolts at the audacity; his spirit arms against his wrong; its face, at least, is bare; the blow, if sacrilegious, is direct. But, when mild words and soft kisses conceal the worst foe Fate can arm—when amidst the confidence of the heart starts up the form of Perfidy—when out from the reptile swells the fiend in its terror—when the breast on which man leaned for comfort has taken counsel to deceive him—when he learns, that day after day, the life entwined with his own has been a lie and a stage-mime, he feels not the softness of grief, nor the absorption of rage; it is

mightier than grief, and more withering than rage; it is a horror that appals. The heart does not bleed; the tears do not flow, as in woes to which humanity is commonly subjected; it is as if something that violates the course of nature had taken place; something monstrous and out of all thought and forewarning; for the domestic traitor is a being apart from the orbit of criminals; the felon has no fear of his innocent children; with a price on his head, he lays it in safety on the bosom of his wife. In his *home*, the ablest man, the most subtle and suspecting, can be as much a dupe as the simplest. Were it not so as the rule, and the exceptions most rare, this world were the riot of a hell!

And therefore it is that to the household perfidy, in all lands, in all ages, God's curse seems to cleave, and to God's curse man abandons it: he does not honour it by hate, still less will he lighten and share the guilt by descending to revenge. He turns aside with a sickness and loathing, and leaves Nature to purify from the earth the ghastly phenomenon she abhors.

Old man! that she wilfully deceived thee—that she abused thy belief—and denied to thy question—and profaned maidenhood to stealth,—all this might have galled thee,—but to these wrongs old men are subjected;—they give mirth to our farces; maid and lover are privileged impostors. But to have counted the sands in thine hour-glass, to have sat by thy side, marvelling when the worms should have thee—and looked smiling on thy face for the signs of the death-writ,—die quick, old man, the executioner hungers for the fee!

There were no tears in those eyes when they came to the close—the letter fell noiselessly to the floor; and the head sank on the breast, and the hands drooped upon the poor crippled limbs, whose crawl in the sunshine hard youth had grudged. He felt humbled, stunned—crushed; the pride was clean gone from him; the cruel words struck home—worse than a cipher, did he then but cumber the earth? At that moment, old Ponto, the setter, shook himself, looked up, and laid his head in his master's lap; and Dash, jealous, rose also, and sprang, not actively, for Dash was old, too, upon his knees, and licked the numbed drooping hands. Now, people praise the fidelity of dogs till

the theme is worn out, but nobody knows what a dog is, unless he has been deceived by men; then, that honest face; then, that sincere caress; then, that coaxing whine that never lied! Well, *then*—what then? A dog is long-lived if he live to ten years—small career this to truth and friendship! Now, when Sir Miles felt that he was not deserted, and his look met those four fond eyes, fixed with that strange wistfulness which, in our hours of trouble, the eyes of a dog sympathisingly assume—an odd thought for a sensible man passed into him—showing, more than pages of sombre elegy, how deep was the sudden misanthropy that blackened the world around. "When I am dead," ran that thought, "is there one human being whom I can trust to take charge of the old man's dogs?"

So—let the scene close!

CHAPTER VI.

THE WILL.

THE next day, or rather the next evening, Sir Miles St. John was seated before his unshared chicken; seated alone, and vaguely surprised at himself, in a large comfortable room in his old hotel, Hanover Square;—yes, he had escaped. Hast thou, O Reader, tasted the luxury of escape from a home where the charm is broken—where Distrust looks askant from the Lares? In vain had Dalibard remonstrated, conjured up dangers, and asked at least to accompany him. Excepting his dogs and his old valet, who was too like a dog in his fond fidelity to rank amongst bipeds, Sir Miles did not wish to have about him a single face familiar at Laughton,—Dalibard especially. Lucretia's letter had hinted at plans and designs in Dalibard. It might be unjust, it might be ungrateful, but he grew sick at the thought that he was the centre-stone of stratagems and plots. The smooth face of the Provençal took a wily expression in his eyes; nay, he thought his very footmen watched his steps as if to count how long before they followed

his bier! So, breaking from all roughly with a shake of his head, and a laconic assertion of business in London, he got into his carriage—his own old bachelor's lumbering travelling carriage —and bade the post-boys drive fast, fast! Then, when he felt alone—quite alone—and the gates of the lodge swung behind him, he rubbed his hands with a schoolboy's glee, and chuckled aloud, as if he enjoyed not only the sense but the fun of his safety—as if he had done something prodigiously cunning and clever.

So when he saw himself snug in his old well-remembered hotel, in the same room as of yore—when returned, brisk and gay, from the breezes of Weymouth or the *brouillards* of Paris, he thought he shook hands again with his youth. Age and lameness, apoplexy and treason, all were forgotten for the moment. And when, as the excitement died, those grim spectres came back again to his thoughts, they found their victim braced and prepared, standing erect on that hearth, for whose hospitality he paid his guinea a-day—his front, proud and defying. He felt yet that he had fortune and power, that a movement of his hand could raise and strike down, that, at the verge of the tomb, he was armed, to punish or reward, with the balance and the sword. Tripped in the smug waiter, and announced "Mr. Parchmount."

"Set a chair, and show him in."

The lawyer entered.

"My dear Sir Miles, this is indeed a surprise! What has brought you to town?"

"The common whim of the old, sir. I would alter my will."

Three days did lawyer and client devote to the task, for Sir Miles was minute, and Mr. Parchmount was precise; and little difficulties arose, and changes in the first outline were made; and Sir Miles, from the very depth of his disgust, desired not to act only from passion. In that last deed of his life, the old man was sublime. He sought to rise out of the mortal, fix his eyes on the Great Judge, weigh circumstances and excuses, and keep justice even and serene.

Meanwhile, unconscious of the train laid afar, Lucretia reposed on the mine,—*reposed*, indeed, is not the word, for she was

agitated and restless that Mainwaring had not obeyed her summons. She wrote to him again from Southampton the third day of her arrival; but before his answer came she received this short epistle from London:—

"Mr. Parchmount presents his compliments to Miss Clavering, and, by desire of Sir Miles St. John, requests her not to return to Laughton. Miss Clavering will hear further in a few days, when Sir Miles has concluded the business that has brought him to London."

This letter, if it excited much curiosity, did not produce alarm. It was natural that Sir Miles should be busy in winding up his affairs; his journey to London for that purpose was no ill omen to her prospects, and her thoughts flew back to the one subject that tyrannized over them. Mainwaring's reply, which came two days afterwards, disquieted her much more. He had not found the letter she had left for him in the tree. He was full of apprehensions; he condemned the imprudence of calling on her at Mr. Fielden's; he begged her to renounce the idea of such a risk. He would return again to Guy's Oak and search more narrowly—had she changed the spot where the former letters were placed? Yet now, not even the non-receipt of her letter, which she ascribed to the care with which she had concealed it amidst the dry leaves and moss, disturbed her so much as the evident constraint with which Mainwaring wrote—the cautious and lukewarm remonstrance which answered her passionate appeal. It may be, that her very doubts, at times, of Mainwaring's affection had increased the ardour of her own attachment; for in some natures the excitement of fear deepens love more than the calmness of trust. Now with the doubt for the first time flashed the resentment, and her answer to Mainwaring was vehement and imperious. But the next day came a messenger express from London, with a letter from Mr. Parchmount, that arrested for the moment even the fierce current of love.

When the task had been completed—the will signed, sealed, and delivered—the old man had felt a load lifted from his heart. There or four of his old friends, *bons vivans* like himself, had

seen his arrival duly proclaimed in the newspapers, and had hastened to welcome him. Warmed by the genial sight of faces associated with the frank joys of his youth, Sir Miles, if he did not forget the prudent counsels of Dalibard, conceived a proud bitterness of joy in despising them. Why take such care of the worn-out carcase? His will was made. What was left to life so peculiarly attractive? He invited his friends to a feast worthy of old: seasoned revellers were they, with a free gout for a vent to all indulgence. So they came; and they drank, and they laughed, and they talked back their young days: they saw not the nervous irritation, the strain on the spirits, the heated membrane of the brain, which made Sir Miles the most jovial of all. It was a night of nights—the old fellows were lifted back into their chariots or sedans. Sir Miles alone seemed as steady and sober as if he had supped with Diogenes. His servant, whose respectful admonitions had been awed into silence, lent him his arm to bed, but Sir Miles scarcely touched it. The next morning, when the servant (who slept in the same room) awoke, to his surprise the glare of a candle streamed on his eyes; he rubbed them: could he see right?—Sir Miles was seated at the table—he must have got up, and lighted a candle to write—noiselessly, indeed. The servant looked and looked, and the stillness of Sir Miles awed him: he was seated on an armchair, leaning back. As awe succeeded to suspicion, he sprang up, approached his master, took his hand: it was cold, and fell heavily from his clasp—Sir Miles must have been dead for hours.

The pen lay on the ground, where it had dropped from the hand; the letter on the table was scarcely commenced; the words ran thus—

"LUCRETIA,—You will return no more to my house. You are free as if I were dead; but I shall be just. *Would* that I had been so to your mother—to your sister! But I am old now, as you say, and——"

To one who could have seen into that poor, proud heart, at the moment the hand paused for ever, what remained unwritten would have been clear. There was, first, the sharp struggle to

conquer loathing repugnance, and address at all the false and degraded one; then came the sharp sting of ingratitude—then the idea of the life grudged, and the grave desired—then the stout victory over scorn—the resolution to be just—then the reproach of the conscience, that for so far less an offence, the sister had been thrown aside—the comfort, perhaps, found in her gentle and neglected child, obstinately repelled — then the conviction of all earthly vanity and nothingness—the look on into life, with the chilling sentiment that affection was gone—that he could never trust again—that he was too old to open his arms to new ties; and then, before felt singly, all these thoughts united, and snapped the cord!

In announcing his mournful intelligence, with more feeling than might have been expected from a lawyer (but even his lawyer loved Sir Miles), Mr. Parchmount observed, that "as the deceased lay at an hotel, and as Miss Clavering's presence would not be needed in the performance of the last rites, she would probably forbear the journey to town. Nevertheless, as it was Sir Miles's wish that the will should be opened as soon as possible after his death, and it would, doubtless, contain instructions as to his funeral, it would be well that Miss Clavering and her sister should immediately depute some one to attend the reading of the testament on their behalf. Perhaps Mr. Fielden would kindly undertake that melancholy office."

To do justice to Lucretia, it must be said, that her first emotions, on the receipt of this letter, were those of a poignant and remorseful grief, for which she was unprepared. But how different it is to count on what shall follow death, and to know that death has come! Susan's sobbing sympathy availed not, nor Mr. Fielden's pious and tearful exhortations; her own sinful thoughts and hopes came back to her, haunting and stern as furies. She insisted at first upon going to London—gazing once more on the clay: nay, the carriage was at the door, for all yielded to her vehemence; but then her heart misgave her: she did not dare to face the dead. Conscience waved her back from the solemn offices of nature; she hid her face with her hands, shrank again into her room; and Mr. Fielden, assuming unbidden the responsibility, went alone.

Only Vernon (summoned from Brighton), the good clergyman, and the lawyer, to whom, as sole executor, the will was addressed, and in whose custody it had been left, were present when the seal of the testament was broken. The will was long, as is common when the dust that it disposes of covers some fourteen or fifteen thousand acres. But out of the mass of technicalities and repetitions these points of interest rose salient—To Charles Vernon, of Vernon Grange, Esq., and his heirs by him lawfully begotten, were left all the lands and woods and manors that covered that space in the Hampshire map known by the name of the "Laughton property," on condition that he and his heirs assumed the name and arms of St. John; and on the failure of Mr. Vernon's issue, the estate passed, first (with the same conditions) to the issue of Susan Mivers; next to that of Lucretia Clavering. There the entail ceased—and the contingency fell to the rival ingenuity of lawyers in hunting out, amongst the remote and forgotten descendants of some ancient St. John, the heir-at-law. To Lucretia Clavering, without a word of endearment, was bequeathed 10,000*l.*: the usual portion which the house of St. John had allotted to its daughters; to Susan Mivers the same sum, but with the addition of these words, withheld from her sister—"*and my blessing!*" To Olivier Dalibard an annuity of 200*l.* a year; to Honoré Gabriel Varney, 3,000*l.*; to the Rev. Matthew Fielden, 4,000*l.*; and the same sum to John Walter Ardworth. To his favourite servant, Henry Jones, an ample provision, and the charge of his dogs Dash and Ponto, with an allowance therefor, to be paid weekly, and cease at their deaths. Poor old man! he made it the interest of their guardian not to grudge *their* lees of life. To his other attendants, suitable and munificent bequests, proportioned to the length of their services. For his body, he desired it to be buried in the vault of his ancestors without pomp, but without a pretence to a humility which he had not manifested in life; and he requested that a small miniature in his writing-desk should be placed in his coffin. That last injunction was more than a sentiment: it bespoke the moral conviction of the happiness the original might have conferred on his life—of that happiness his pride had deprived him; nor did he repent, for he had deemed pride

a duty ; but the mute likeness, buried in his grave—*that* told the might of the sacrifice he had made ! Death removes all distinctions, and in the coffin the Lord of Laughton might choose his partner.

When the will had been read, Mr. Parchmount produced two letters, one addressed in the hand of the deceased to Mr. Vernon, the other in the lawyer's own hand to Miss Clavering. The last inclosed the fragment found on Sir Miles's table, and her own letter to Mainwaring, redirected to her in Sir Miles's boldest and stateliest autograph. He had, no doubt, meant to return it in the letter left uncompleted.

The letter to Vernon contained a copy of Lucretia's fatal epistle, and the following lines to Vernon himself :—

"My Dear Charles,—With much deliberation, and with natural reluctance to reveal to you my niece's shame, I feel it my duty to transmit to you the accompanying inclosure, copied from the original with my own hand, which the task sullied.

"I do so first, because otherwise you might, as I should have done in your place, feel bound in honour to persist in the offer of your hand—feel bound the more, because Miss Clavering is not my heiress ; secondly, because had her attachment been stronger than her interest, and she had refused your offer, you might still have deemed her hardly and capriciously dealt with by me, and not only sought to augment her portion, but have profaned the house of my ancestors by receiving her there as an honoured and welcome relative and guest. Now, Charles Vernon, I believe, to the utmost of my poor judgment, I have done what is right and just. I have taken into consideration that this young person has been brought up as a daughter of my house, and what the daughters of my house have received, I bequeath her ; I put aside, as far as I can, all resentment of mere family pride ; I show that I do so, when I repair my harshness to my poor sister, and leave *both* her children the same provision. And if you exceed what I have done for Lucretia, unless, on more dispassionate consideration than I can give, you conscientiously think me wrong, you insult my memory and impugn my justice. Be it in this as your conscience

dictates; but I entreat, I adjure, I command, at least, that you never knowingly admit by a hearth, hitherto sacred to unblemished truth and honour, a person who has desecrated it with treason. As gentleman to gentleman, I impose on you this solemn injunction. I could have wished to leave that young woman's children barred from the entail; but our old tree has so few branches! You are unwedded; Susan, too. I must take my chance that Miss Clavering's children, if ever they inherit, do not imitate the mother. I conclude she will wed that Mainwaring; her children will have a low-born father. Well, *her* race, at least, is pure, Clavering and St. John are names to guarantee faith and honour; yet you see what *she* is! —Charles Vernon, if her issue inherit the soul of gentlemen, it must come, after all, not from the well-born mother! I have lived to say this; I, who—but perhaps if we had looked more closely into the pedigree of those Claverings!——

"Marry yourself—marry soon, Charles Vernon, my dear kinsman—keep the old house in the old line, and true to its old fame. Be kind and good to my poor—don't strain on the tenants. By the way, Farmer Strongbow owes three years' rent—I forgive him—pension him off—he can do no good to the land, but he was born on it, and must not fall on the parish. But to be kind and good to the poor, not to strain the tenants, you must learn not to waste, my dear Charles. A needy man can never be generous without being unjust. How give, if you are in debt? You will think of this —now—*now*—while your good heart is soft—while your feelings are moved. Charley Vernon, I think you will shed a tear when you see my armchair still and empty. And I would have left you the care of my dogs, but you are thoughtless and will go much to London, and they are used to the country now. Old Jones will have a cottage in the village; he has promised to live there; drop in now and then, and see poor Ponto and Dash. It is late, and old friends come to dine here. So, if anything happens to me, and we don't meet again, good-bye, and God bless you. — Your affectionate kinsman,

"MILES ST. JOHN."

CHAPTER VII.

THE ENGAGEMENT.

IT is somewhat less than three months after the death of Sir Miles St. John—November reigns in London. And "reigns" seems scarcely a metaphorical expression as applied to the sullen, absolute sway which that dreary month (first in the dynasty of Winter) spreads over the passive, dejected city.

Elsewhere in England, November is no such gloomy, grim fellow as he is described. Over the brown glebes and changed woods in the country, his still face looks contemplative and mild; and he has soft smiles, too, at times—lighting up his taxed vassals the groves,—gleaming, where the leaves still cling to the boughs,—and reflected in dimples from the waves which still glide free from his chains. But as a conqueror, who makes his home in the capital, weighs down with hard policy the mutinous citizens, long ere his iron influence is felt in the province, so the first tyrant of Winter has only rigour and frowns for London. The very aspect of the wayfarers has the look of men newly enslaved; cloaked and muffled, they steal to and fro through the dismal fogs. Even the children creep timidly through the streets; the carriages go cautious and hearse-like along; daylight is dim and obscure; the town is not filled, nor the brisk mirth of Christmas commenced; the unsocial shadows flit amidst the mist, like men on the eve of a fatal conspiracy. Each other month in London has its charms for the experienced. Even from August to October, when The Season lies dormant, and Fashion forbids her sons to be seen within hearing of Bow, the true lover of London finds pleasure still at hand, if he search for her duly. The early walks through the parks and green Kensington Gardens, which now change their character of resort, and seem rural and countrylike, but yet with more life than the country; for on the benches beneath the trees, and along the sward, and up the malls, are living beings

enough to interest the eye, and divert the thoughts, if you are a guesser into character, and amateur of the human face; fresh nurserymaid and playful children, and the old shabby-genteel buttoned-up officer, musing on half-pay, as he sits alone in some alcove of Kenna, or leans pensive over the rail of the vacant Ring; and early tradesman, or clerk from the suburban lodging, trudging brisk to his business,—for business never ceases in London. Then at noon, what delight to escape to the banks at Putney or Richmond,—the row up the river,—the fishing punt,—the ease at your inn till dark!—or, if this tempt not, still Autumn shines clear and calm over the roofs, where the smoke has a holiday; and how clean gleam the vistas through the tranquillised thoroughfares; and as you saunter along, you have all London to yourself, Andrew Selkirk, but with the mart of the world for your desert! And when October comes on, it has one characteristic of spring,—life busily returns to the city; you see the shops bustling up, trade flowing back; as birds scent the April, so the children of commerce plume their wings, and prepare for the first slack returns of the season. But November!—strange the taste, stout the lungs, grief-defying the heart, of the visitor who finds charms and joy in a London November.

In a small lodging-house in Bulstrode Street, Manchester Square, grouped a family in mourning, who had had the temerity to come to town in November, for the purpose, no doubt, of raising their spirits. In the dull, small drawing-room of the dull, small house, we introduce to you, first, a middle-aged gentleman, whose dress showed, what dress now fails to show—his profession; nobody could mistake the cut of the cloth, and the shape of the hat, for he had just come in from a walk, and not from discourtesy, but abstraction, the broad brim still shadowed his pleasant, placid face. Parson spoke out in him, from beaver to buckle. By the coal fire, where, through volumes of smoke, fussed and flickered a pretension to flame, sat a middle-aged lady, whom, without being a conjuror, you would pronounce at once to be wife to the parson; and sundry children sat on stools all about her.

with one book between them, and a low whispered murmur from their two or three pursed-up lips, announcing that that book was superfluous. By the last of three dim-looking windows, made dimmer by brown moreen draperies, edged genteelly with black cotton velvet, stood a girl of very soft and pensive expression of features—pretty unquestionably—excessively pretty; but there was something so delicate and elegant about her,—the bend of her head, the shape of her slight figure, the little fair hands crossed one on each other, as the face mournfully and listlessly turned to the window—that "pretty" would have seemed a word of praise, too often proffered to milliner and serving-maid. Nevertheless, it was perhaps the right one; handsome would have implied something statelier, and more commanding—beautiful, greater regularity of feature, or richness of colouring. The parson, who since his entrance had been walking up and down the small room with his hands behind him, glanced now and then at the young lady, but not speaking, at length paused from that monotonous exercise by the chair of his wife, and touched her shoulder. She stopped from her work, which, more engrossing than elegant, was nothing less than what is technically called "the taking in" of a certain blue jacket, which was about to pass from Matthew, the eldest born, to David, the second, and looked up at her husband affectionately. Her husband, however, spoke not, he only made a sign, partly with his eyebrow, partly with a jerk of his thumb over his right shoulder, in the direction of the young lady we have described, and then completed the pantomime with a melancholy shake of the head. The wife turned round, and looked hard, the scissors horizontally raised in one hand, while the other reposed on the cuff of the jacket. At this moment a low knock was heard at the street-door. The worthy pair saw the girl shrink back, with a kind of tremulous movement; presently there came the sound of a footstep below—the creak of a hinge on the ground-floor—and again all was silent.

"That is Mr. Mainwaring's knock," said one of the children.

The girl left the room abruptly, and, light as was her step, they heard her steal up the stairs.

"My dears," said the parson, "it wants an hour yet to dark, you may go and walk in the square."

"'Tis so dull in that ugly square, and they won't let us into the green. I am sure we'd rather stay here," said one of the children, as spokesman for the rest, and they all nestled closer round the hearth.

"But, my dears," said the parson, simply, "I want to talk alone with your mother. However, if you like best to go and keep quiet in your own room, you may do so."

"Or we can go into Susan's?"

"No," said the parson; "you must not disturb Susan."

"She never *used* to care about being disturbed. I wonder what's come to her?"

The parson made no rejoinder to this half-petulant question. The children consulted together a moment, and resolved that the square, though so dull, was less dull than their own little attic. That being decided, it was the mother's turn to address them. And though Mr. Fielden was as anxious and fond as most fathers, he grew a little impatient before comforters, kerchiefs, and muffattees were arranged, and minute exordiums as to the danger of crossing the street, and the risk of patting strange dogs, &c. &c. were half-way concluded;—with a shrug and a smile, he at length fairly pushed out the children, shut the door, and drew his chair close to his wife's.

"My dear," he began at once, "I am extremely uneasy about that poor girl."

"What! Miss Clavering? Indeed, she eats almost nothing at all, and sits so moping alone; but she sees Mr. Mainwaring every day. What can *we* do? She is so proud, I'm afraid of her."

"My dear, I was not thinking of Miss Clavering, though I did not interrupt you, for it is very true that she is much to be pitied."

"And I am sure it was for her sake alone that you agreed to Susan's request, and got Blackman to do duty for you at the vicarage, while we all came up here, in hopes London town would divert her. We left all at sixes and sevens; and I should not at all wonder if John made away with the apples."

"But, I say," resumed the parson, without heeding that mournful foreboding—"I say, I was then only thinking of Susan. You see how pale and sad she is grown."

"Why, she is so very soft-hearted, and she must feel for her sister."

"But her sister, though she thinks much, and keeps aloof from us, is not sad herself; only reserved. On the contrary, I believe she has now got over even poor Sir Miles's death."

"And the loss of the great property!"

"Fie, Mary!" said Mr. Fielden, almost austerely.

Mary looked down, rebuked, for she was not one of the high-spirited wives who despise their husbands for goodness.

"I beg pardon, my dear," she said, meekly; "it was very wrong in me; but I cannot—do what I will—I cannot like that Miss Clavering."

"The more need to judge her with charity. And, if what I fear is the case, I'm sure we can't feel too much compassion for the poor, blinded young lady."

"Bless my heart, Mr. Fielden, what is it you mean?"

The parson looked round, to be sure the door was quite closed, and replied, in a whisper—"I mean, that I fear William Mainwaring loves not Lucretia, but Susan."

The scissors fell from the hand of Mrs. Fielden; and though one point stuck in the ground, and the other point threatened war upon flounces and toes, strange to say, she did not even stoop to remove the *chevaux-de-frise*.

"Why, then, he's a most false-hearted young man!"

"To blame, certainly," said Fielden; "I don't say to the contrary, though I like the young man, and am sure that he's more timid than false. I may now tell you—for I want your advice, Mary—what I kept secret before. When Mainwaring visited us, many months ago, at Southampton, he confessed to me that he felt warmly for Susan, and asked if I thought Sir Miles would consent. I knew too well how proud the poor old gentleman was, to give him any such hopes. So he left very honourably. You remember, after he went, that Susan's spirits were low—you remarked it.

"Yes, indeed, I remember. But when the first shock of Sir

Miles's death was over, she got back her sweet colour, and looked cheerful enough."

"Because, perhaps, then she felt that she had a fortune to bestow on Mr. Mainwaring, and thought all obstacle was over."

"Why, how clever you are! How did you get at her thoughts?"

"My own folly—my own rash folly," almost groaned Mr. Fielden. "For, not guessing that Mr. Mainwaring could have got engaged meanwhile to Lucretia, and suspecting how it was with Susan's poor little heart, I let out, in a jest—Heaven forgive me!—what William had said; and the dear child blushed, and kissed me, and—why, a day or two after, when it was fixed that we should come up to London, Lucretia informed me, with her freezing politeness, that she was to marry Mainwaring herself, as soon as her first mourning was over."

"Poor, dear—dear Susan!"

"Susan behaved like an angel; and when I broached it to her, I thought she was calm; and I am sure she prayed with her whole heart that both might be happy."

"I'm sure she did. What is to be done? I understand it all now. Dear me, dear me!—a sad piece of work, indeed." And Mrs. Fielden abstractedly picked up the scissors.

"It was not till our coming to town, and Mr. Mainwaring's visits to Lucretia, that her strength gave way."

"A hard sight to bear: I never could have borne it, my love. If I had seen you paying court to another, I should have—I don't know what I should have done! But what an artful wretch this young Mainwaring must be."

"Not very artful; for you see that he looks even sadder than Susan. He got entangled somehow, to be sure. Perhaps he had given up Susan in despair; and Miss Clavering, if haughty, is no doubt a very superior young lady; and, I dare say, it is only now in seeing them both together, and comparing the two, that he feels what a treasure he has lost. Well, what do you advise, Mary? Mainwaring, no doubt, is bound in honour to Miss Clavering; but she will be sure to discover, sooner or later, the state of his feelings, and then I tremble for both. I'm sure she will never be happy, while he will be wretched; and Susan

—I dare not think upon Susan—she has a cough that goes to my heart."

"So she has; that cough—you don't know the money I spend on black-currant jelly! What's my advice? why, I'd speak to Miss Clavering at once, if I dared. I'm sure love will never break *her* heart; and she's so proud, she'd throw him off without a sigh, if she knew how things stood."

"I believe you are right," said Mr. Fielden; "for truth is the best policy, after all. Still, it's scarce my business to meddle; and if it were not for Susan—well, well, I must think of it, and pray Heaven to direct me."

This conference suffices to explain to the reader the stage to which the history of Lucretia had arrived. Willingly we pass over what it were scarcely possible to describe—her first shock at the fall from the expectations of her life;—fortune, rank, and what she valued more than either, power—crushed at a blow. From the dark and sullen despair into which she was first plunged, she was roused into hope—into something like joy—by Mainwaring's letters. Never had they been so warm and so tender; for the young man felt not only poignant remorse that he had been the cause of her downfall (though she broke it to him with more delicacy than might have been expected from the state of her feelings and the hardness of her character), but he felt also imperiously the obligations which her loss rendered more binding than ever. He persuaded, he urged, he forced himself into affection; and, probably, without a murmur of his heart, he would have gone with her to the altar, and, once wedded, custom and duty would have strengthened the chain imposed on himself, had it not been for Lucretia's fatal eagerness to see him, to come up to London, where she induced him to meet her—for with her came Susan; and in Susan's averted face, and trembling hand, and mute avoidance of his eye, he read all which the poor dissembler fancied she concealed. But the die was cast, the union announced, the time fixed, and day by day he came to the house, to leave it in anguish and despair. A feeling they shared in common caused these two unhappy persons to shun each other. Mainwaring rarely

came into the usual sitting-room of the family; and when he did so, chiefly in the evening, Susan usually took refuge in her own room. If they met it was by accident, on the stairs, or at the sudden opening of a door; then not only no word, but scarcely even a look was exchanged; neither had the courage to face the other. Perhaps, of the two, this reserve weighed most on Susan; perhaps she most yearned to break the silence, for she thought she divined the cause of Mainwaring's gloomy and mute constraint, in the upbraidings of his conscience, which might doubtless recall—if no positive pledge to Susan—at least, those words and tones which betray the one heart, and seek to allure the other; and the profound melancholy stamped on his whole person, apparent even to her hurried glance, touched her with a compassion free from all the bitterness of selfish reproach. She fancied she could die happy if she could remove that cloud from his brow, that shadow from his conscience. Die—for she thought not of life. She loved gently, quietly; not with the vehement passion that belongs to stronger natures; but it was the love of which the young and the pure have died. The face of the Genius was calm and soft; and only by the lowering of the hand do you see that the torch burns out, and that the image too serene for earthly love, is the genius of loving Death.

Absorbed in the egotism of her passion—increased, as is ever the case with women, even the worst, by the sacrifices it had cost her—and if that passion paused, by the energy of her ambition, which already began to scheme and reconstruct new scaffolds to repair the ruined walls of the past, Lucretia as yet had not detected what was so apparent to the simple sense of Mr. Fielden. That Mainwaring was grave, and thoughtful, and abstracted, she ascribed only to his grief at the thought of her loss, and his anxieties for her altered future; and in her efforts to console him, her attempts to convince him that greatness in England did not consist only in lands and manors—that in the higher walks of life which conduct to the Temple of Renown, the leaders of the procession are the aristocracy of knowledge and of intellect—she so betrayed, not generous emulation and high-souled aspiring, but the dark, unscrupulous, tortuous

ambition of cunning, stratagem, and intrigue, that instead of feeling grateful and encouraged, he shuddered and revolted. How, accompanied and led by a spirit which he felt to be stronger and more commanding than his own—how preserve the whiteness of his soul, the uprightness of his honour? Already he felt himself debased. But in the still trial of domestic intercourse, with the daily, hourly dripping on the stone, in the many struggles between truth and falsehood, guile and candour, which men—and, above all, ambitious men—must wage, what darker angel would whisper him in his monitor? Still he was bound—bound with an iron band—he writhed, but dreamed not of escape.

The day after that of Fielden's conference with his wife, an unexpected visitor came to the house. Olivier Dalibard called. He had not seen Lucretia since she had left Laughton, nor had any correspondence passed between them. He came at dusk, just after Mainwaring's daily visit was over, and Lucretia was still in the parlour which she had appropriated to herself. Her brow contracted as his name was announced, and the maid-servant lighted the candle on the table, stirred the fire, and gave a tug at the curtains. Her eye, glancing from his, round the mean room, with its dingy horsehair furniture, involuntarily implied the contrast between the past state and the present, which his sight could scarcely help to impress on her. But she welcomed him with her usual stately composure, and without reference to what had been. Dalibard was secretly anxious to discover if she suspected himself of any agency in the detection of the eventful letter, and, assured by her manner that no such thought was yet harboured, he thought it best to imitate her own reserve. He assumed, however, a manner that, far more respectful than he ever before observed to his pupil, was nevertheless sufficiently kind and familiar to restore them gradually to their old footing; and that he succeeded was apparent, when, after a pause, Lucretia said abruptly—"How did Sir Miles St. John discover my correspondence with Mr. Mainwaring?"

"Is it possible that you are ignorant? Ah, how—how should you know it?" And Dalibard so simply explained the occurrence, in which, indeed, it was impossible to trace the hand

that had moved springs which seemed so entirely set at work by an accident, that despite the extreme suspiciousness of her nature, Lucretia did not see a pretence for accusing him. Indeed, when he related the little subterfuge of Gabriel, his attempt to save her by taking the letter on himself, she felt thankful to the boy, and deemed Gabriel's conduct quite in keeping with his attachment to herself. And this accounted satisfactorily for the only circumstance that had ever troubled her with a doubt—viz., the legacy left to Gabriel. She knew enough of Sir Miles to be aware that he would be grateful to any one who had saved the name of his niece, even while most embittered against her, from the shame attached to clandestine correspondence.

"It is strange, nevertheless," said she, thoughtfully, after a pause, "that the girl should have detected the letter, concealed as it was, by the leaves that covered it."

"But," answered Dalibard, readily, "you see two or three persons had entered before, and their feet must have displaced the leaves."

"Possibly; the evil is now past recall."

"And Mr. Mainwaring? do you still adhere to one who has cost you so much, poor child?"

"In three months more I shall be his wife."

Dalibard sighed deeply, but offered no remonstrance.

"Well," he said, taking her hand with mingled reverence and affection—"well, I oppose your inclinations no more, for *now* there is nothing to risk; you are mistress of your own fortune; and since Mainwaring has talents, that fortune will suffice for a career. Are you at length convinced that I have conquered my folly? that I was disinterested when I incurred your displeasure? If so, can you restore to me your friendship? You will have some struggle with the world, and, with my long experience of men and life, even I, the poor exile, may assist you."

And so thought Lucretia; for, with some dread of Dalibard's craft, she yet credited his attachment to herself, and she felt profound admiration for an intelligence more consummate and accomplished than any ever yet submitted to her comprehension

From that time, Dalibard became an habitual visitor at the house; he never interfered with Lucretia's interviews with Mainwaring; he took the union for granted, and conversed with her cheerfully on the prospects before her; he ingratiated himself with the Fieldens, played with the children, made himself at home, and in the evenings when Mainwaring, as often as he could find the excuse, absented himself from the family circle, he contrived to draw Lucretia into more social intercourse with her homely companions than she had before condescended to admit. Good Mr. Fielden rejoiced: here was the very person, the old friend of Sir Miles, the preceptor of Lucretia herself, evidently most attached to her, having influence over her—the very person to whom to confide his embarrassment. One day, therefore, when Dalibard had touched his heart by noticing the paleness of Susan, he took him aside, and told him all. "And now," concluded the pastor, hoping he had found one to relieve him of his dreaded and ungracious task, "don't you think that I—or rather you—as so old a friend, should speak frankly to Miss Clavering herself?"

"No, indeed," said the Provençal, quickly; "if we spoke to her, she would disbelieve us. She would no doubt appeal to Mainwaring, and Mainwaring would have no choice but to contradict us. Once put on his guard, he would control his very sadness. Lucretia, offended, might leave your house, and certainly she would regard her sister as having influenced your confession—a position unworthy Miss Mivers. But do not fear: if the evil be so, it carries with it its inevitable remedy. Let Lucretia discover it herself; but, pardon me, she must have seen, at your first reception of Mainwaring, that he had before been acquainted with you?"

"She was not in the room when we first received Mainwaring, and I have always been distant to him, as you may suppose, for I felt disappointed and displeased. Of course, however, she is aware that we knew him before she did. What of that?"

"Why, do you think, then, he told her at Laughton of this acquaintance?—that he spoke of Susan? I suspect not."

"I cannot say, I am sure," said Mr. Fielden.

"Ask her that question accidentally, and for the rest be

discreet, my dear sir. I thank you for your confidence. I will watch well over my poor young pupil. She must not, indeed, be sacrificed to a man whose affections are engaged elsewhere."

Dalibard trod on air as he left the house; his very countenance had changed; he seemed ten years younger. It was evening; and suddenly, as he came into Oxford Street, he encountered a knot of young men—noisy and laughing loud—obstructing the pavement, breaking jests on the more sober passengers, and attracting the especial and admiring attention of sundry ladies in plumed hats and scarlet pelisses; for the streets then enjoyed a gay liberty which has vanished from London with the lanterns of the watchmen. Noisiest, and most conspicuous of these descendants of the Mohawks, the sleek and orderly scholar beheld the childish figure of his son. Nor did Gabriel shrink from his father's eye, stern and scornful as it was, but rather braved the glance with an impudent leer.

Right, however, in the midst of the group, strode the Provençal, and laying his hand very gently on the boy's shoulder, he said—"My son, come with me."

Gabriel looked irresolute, and glanced at his companions. Delighted at the prospect of a scene, they now gathered round, with countenances and gestures that seemed little disposed to acknowledge the parental authority.

"Gentlemen," said Dalibard, turning a shade more pale, for though morally most resolute, physically he was not brave—"gentlemen, I must beg you to excuse me—this child is my son!"

"But Art is his mother," replied a tall, raw-boned young man, with long tawny hair streaming down from a hat very much battered. "At the juvenile age, the child is consigned to the mother! Have I said it?" and he turned round theatrically to his comrades.

"Bravo!" cried the rest, clapping their hands.

"Down with all tyrants and fathers—hip, hip, hurrah!" and the hideous diapason nearly split the drum of the ears into which it resounded.

"Gabriel," whispered the father, "you had better follow me, *had you not?* Reflect!" So saying, he bowed low to the

unpropitious assembly, and, as if yielding the victory, stepped aside, and crossed over towards Bond Street.

Before the din of derision and triumph died away. Dalibard looked back, and saw Gabriel behind him.

"Approach, sir," he said; and as the boy stood still he added, "I promise peace if you will accept it."

"Peace, then," answered Gabriel, and he joined his father's side.

"So," said Dalibard, "when I consented to your studying Art, as you call it, under your mother's most respectable brother, I ought to have contemplated what would be the natural and becoming companions of the rising Raffaele I have given to the world."

"I own, sir," replied Gabriel, demurely, "that they are riotous fellows, but some of them are clever, and——"

"And excessively drunk," interrupted Dalibard, examining the gait of his son. "Do you learn that accomplishment also, by way of steadying your hand for the easel?"

"No, sir; I like wine well enough, but I would not be drunk for the world. I see people when they are drunk are mere fools —let out their secrets, and show themselves up."

"Well said," replied the father, almost admiringly; "but a truce with this bantering, Gabriel. Can you imagine that I will permit you any longer to remain with that vagabond Varney, and yon crew of *Vauriens?* You will come home with me; and if you must be a painter, I will look out for a more trustworthy master."

"I shall stay where I am," answered Gabriel, firmly, and compressing his lips with a force that left them bloodless.

"What, boy? do I hear right? Dare you disobey me? Dare you defy?"

"Not in your house, so I will not enter it again."

Dalibard laughed, mockingly.

"*Peste!* but this is modest! You are not of age yet, Mr. Varney;—you are not free from a father's tyrannical control."

"The law does not own you as my father, I am told, sir; you have said my name rightly—it is Varney, not Dalibard. We

have no rights over each other; so at least says Tom Passmore, and his father's a lawyer!"

Dalibard's hand griped his son's arm fiercely. Despite his pain, which was acute, the child uttered no cry; but he growled beneath his teeth, "Beware! beware!—or my mother's son may avenge her death!"

Dalibard removed his hand, and staggered as if struck. Gliding from his side, Gabriel seized the occasion to escape; he paused, however, midway in the dull lamp-lit kennel, when he saw himself out of reach, and then approaching cautiously, said —"I know I am a boy, but you have made me man enough to take care of myself. Mr. Varney, my uncle, will maintain me—when of age, old Sir Miles has provided for me. Leave me in peace—treat me as free; and I will visit you, help you when you want me—obey you still, yes, follow your instructions; for I know you are"—he paused—"you are *wise;* but if you seek again to make me your slave, you will only find your foe. Good night; and remember that a bastard has no father!"

With these words he moved on, and hurrying down the street, turned the corner and vanished.

Dalibard remained motionless for some minutes—at length he muttered, "Ay, let him go, he is dangerous!—What son ever revolted even from the worst father, and throve in life?—Food for the gibbet! What matters?"

When next Dalibard visited Lucretia, his manner was changed —the cheerfulness he had before assumed gave place to a kind of melancholy compassion; he no longer entered into her plans for the future, but would look at her mournfully, start up, and walk away. She would have attributed the change to some return of his ancient passion, but she heard him once murmur with unspeakable pity, "Poor child—poor child!" A vague apprehension seized her—first, indeed, caught from some remarks dropped by Mr. Fielden, which were less discreet than Dalibard had recommended. A day or two afterwards, she asked Mainwaring, carelessly, "why he had never spoken to her at Laughton of his acquaintance with Fielden."

"You asked me that before," he said, somewhat sullenly.

"Did I? I forget! But how was it? Tell me again."

"I scarcely know," he replied, confusedly; "we were always talking of each other, or poor Sir Miles—our own hopes and fears."

This was true, and a lover's natural excuse. In the present of love all the past is forgotten.

"Still," said Lucretia, with her sidelong glance—"still, as you must have seen much of my own sister ——"

Mainwaring, while she spoke, was at work on a button on his gaiter—(gaiters were then worn tight at the ankle)—the effort brought the blood to his forehead.

"But," he said, still stooping at his occupation, "you were so little intimate with your sister,—I feared to offend. Family differences are so difficult to approach."

Lucretia was satisfied at the moment. For so vast was her stake in Mainwaring's heart, so did her whole heart and soul grapple to the rock left serene amidst the deluge, that she habitually and resolutely thrust from her mind all the doubts that at times invaded it.

"I know," she would often say to herself—"I know he does not love as I do—but man never can, never ought to love as woman! Were I a man, I should scorn myself if I could be so absorbed in one emotion as I am proud to be now—I, poor woman! — I know," again she would think,—"I know how suspicious and distrustful I am—I must not distrust *him*—I shall only irritate—I may lose him: I *dare* not distrust—it would be too dreadful."

Thus, as a system vigorously embraced by a determined mind, she had schooled and forced herself into reliance on her lover. His words now, we say, satisfied her at the moment; but afterwards, in absence, they were recalled, in spite of herself—in the midst of fears, shapeless and undefined. Involuntarily she began to examine the countenance, the movements, of her sister—to court Susan's society more than she had done—for her previous indifference had now deepened into bitterness. Susan, the neglected and despised, had become her equal—nay, more than her equal—Susan's children would have precedence to her own in the heritage of Laughton! Hitherto she had never deigned to talk to her in the sweet familiarity of sisters so placed

—never deigned to confide to her those feelings for her future husband which burned lone and ardent in the close vault of her guarded heart. Now, however, she began to name him, wind her arm into Susan's, talk of love and home, and the days to come; and as she spoke, she read the workings of her sister's face. That part of the secret grew clear almost at the first glance. Susan loved—loved William Mainwaring; but was it not a love hopeless and unreturned? Might not this be the cause that had made Mainwaring so reserved? He might have seen, or conjectured, a conquest he had not sought; and hence, with manly delicacy, he had avoided naming Susan to Lucretia; and now, perhaps, sought the excuses which at times had chafed and wounded her for not joining the household circle. If one of those who glance over these pages chance to be a person more than usually able and acute—a person who has loved and been deceived—he or she, no matter which, will perhaps recall those first moments when the doubt, long put off, insisted to be heard; a weak and foolish heart gives way to the doubt at once, not so the subtler and more powerful; it rather, on the contrary, recalls all the little circumstances that justify trust and make head against suspicion; it will not render the citadel at the mere sound of the trumpet; it arms all its forces, and bars its gates on the foe. Hence it is, that the persons most easy to dupe in matters of affection are usually those most astute in the larger affairs of life. Molière, reading every riddle in the vast complexities of human character, and clinging, in self-imposed credulity, to his profligate wife, is a type of a striking truth. Still, a foreboding, a warning instinct withheld Lucretia from plumbing farther into the deeps of her own fears. So horrible was the thought that she had been deceived, that rather than face it, she would have preferred to deceive herself. This poor bad heart shrank from inquiry—it trembled at the idea of condemnation. She hailed, with a sentiment of release that partook of rapture, Susan's abrupt announcement one morning, that she had accepted an invitation from some relations of her father, to spend some time with them at their villa near Hampstead; she was to go the end of the week. Lucretia hailed it, though she saw the cause. Susan shrank

from the name of Mainwaring on Lucretia's lips—shrank from the familiar intercourse so ruthlessly forced on her! With a bright eye, that day, Lucretia met her lover; yet she would not tell him of Susan's intended departure—she had not the courage.

Dalibard was foiled. This contradiction in Lucretia's temper—so suspicious—so determined—puzzled even his penetration. He saw that bolder tactics were required. He waylaid Mainwaring on the young man's way to his lodgings, and, after talking to him on indifferent matters, asked him carelessly, whether he did not think Susan far gone in a decline. Affecting not to notice the convulsive start with which the question was received, he went on—

"There is evidently something on her mind—I observe that her eyes are often red as with weeping—poor girl!—perhaps some silly love affair. However, we shall not see her again before your marriage; she is going away in a day or two; the change of air may possibly yet restore her: I own, though, I fear the worst. At this time of the year, and in your climate, such complaints as I take hers to be are rapid. Good day. We may meet this evening."

Terror-stricken at these barbarous words, Mainwaring no sooner reached his lodging than he wrote and despatched a note to Fielden, entreating him to call.

The Vicar obeyed the summons, and found Mainwaring in a state of mind bordering on distraction; nor when Susan was named did Fielden's words take the shape of comfort; for he himself was seriously alarmed for her health; the sound of her low cough rang in his ears, and he rather heightened than removed the picture which haunted Mainwaring — Susan, stricken, dying, broken-hearted!

Tortured both in heart and conscience, Mainwaring felt as if he had but one wish left in the world—to see Susan once more! What to say, he scarce knew; but for her to depart—depart, perhaps to her grave, believing him coldly indifferent—for her not to know, at least, his struggles, and pronounce his pardon, was a thought beyond endurance. After such an interview both would have new fortitude—each would unite in

encouraging the other in the only step left to honour. And this desire he urged upon Fielden with all the eloquence of passionate grief, as he entreated him to permit and procure one last conference with Susan. But this, the plain sense and straightforward conscience of the good man long refused. If Mainwaring had been left in the position to explain his heart to Lucretia, it would not have been for Fielden to object; but to have a clandestine interview with one sister while betrothed to the other, bore in itself a character too equivocal to meet with the simple Vicar's approval.

"What can you apprehend?" exclaimed the young man, almost fiercely—for, harassed and tortured, his mild nature was driven to bay. "Can you suppose that I shall encourage my own misery by the guilty pleadings of unavailing love? All that I ask is the luxury—yes, the luxury, long unknown to me, of candour—to place fairly and manfully before Susan the position in which fate has involved me. Can you suppose that we shall not both take comfort and strength from each other? Our duty is plain and obvious; but it grows less painful, encouraged by the lips of a companion in suffering I tell you fairly, that see Susan I will and must. I will watch round her home wherever it be—hour after hour—come what may, I will find my occasion. Is it not better that the interview should be under your roof, within the same walls which shelter her sister? *There*, the place itself imposes restraint on despair. Oh, sir, this is no time for formal scruples—be merciful, I beseech you, not to me, but to Susan. I judge of her by myself. I know that I shall go to the altar more resigned to the future, if for once I can give vent to what weighs upon my heart. She will then see as I do, that the path before me is inevitable; she will compose herself to face the fate that compels us. We shall swear tacitly to each other, not to love, but to conquer love. Believe me, sir, I am not selfish in this prayer: an instinct, the intuition which human grief has into the secrets of human grief, assures me that that which I ask is the best consolation you can afford to Susan. You own she is ill—suffering. Are not your fears for her very life—O Heaven, for her very life—gravely awakened? And yet

you see, we have been silent to each other! Can speech be more fatal in its results than silence? Oh, for her sake, hear me!"

The good man's tears fell fast—his scruples were shaken; there was truth in what Mainwaring urged. He did not yield; but he promised to reflect, and inform Mainwaring, by a line, in the evening. Finding this was all he could effect, the young man at last suffered him to leave the house, and Fielden hastened to take counsel of Dalibard; that wily persuader soon reasoned away Mr. Fielden's last faint objection—it now only remained to procure Susan's assent to the interview, and to arrange that it should be undisturbed. Mr. Fielden should take out the children the next morning. Dalibard volunteered to contrive the absence of Lucretia at the hour appointed. Mrs. Fielden, alone, should remain within, and might, if it were judged proper, be present at the interview, which was fixed for the forenoon in the usual drawing-room. Nothing but Susan's consent was now necessary, and Mr. Fielden ascended to her room. He knocked twice—no sweet voice bade him enter; he opened the door gently—Susan was in prayer. At the opposite corner of the room, by the side of her bed, she knelt, her face buried in her hands, and he heard, low and indistinct, the murmur broken by the sob. But gradually, and, as he stood unperceived, sob and murmur ceased—prayer had its customary and blessed effect with the pure and earnest. And when Susan rose, though the tears yet rolled down her cheeks, the face was serene as an angel's.

The pastor approached and took her hand;—a blush then broke over her countenance—she trembled, and her eyes fell on the ground. "My child," he said, solemnly, "God will hear you!" And, after those words, there was a long silence. He then drew her passively towards a seat, and sat down by her, embarrassed how to begin. At length, he said, looking somewhat aside, "Mr. Mainwaring has made me a request—a prayer which relates to you, and which I refer to you. He asks you to grant him an interview, before you leave us—to-morrow, if you will. I refused at first—I am in doubt still; for, my dear, I have always found that, when the feelings

move us, our duty becomes less clear to the human heart—corrupt, we know—but still it is often a safer guide than our reason: I never knew reason unerring, except in mathematics; we have no Euclid (and the good man smiled mournfully) in the problems of real life; I will not urge you one way or the other—I put the case before you Would it, as the young man says, give you comfort and strength to see him once again while, while—in short, before your sister is—I mean before—that is, would it soothe you *now*, to have an unreserved communication with him? He implores it. What shall I answer?"

"This trial, too!" muttered Susan, almost inaudibly—"this trial which I once yearned for"—and the hand clasped in Fielden's was as cold as ice; then, turning her eyes to her guardian somewhat wildly, she cried, "But to what end? what object? why should he wish to see me?"

"To take greater courage to do his duty—to feel less unhappy at—at——"

"I will see him," interrupted Susan, firmly, "he is right, it will strengthen both—I will see him!"

"But human nature is weak, my child; if my heart be so now, what will be yours?"

"Fear me not," answered Susan with a sad, wandering smile; and she repeated vacantly; "I will see him!"

The good man looked at her, threw his arms round her wasted form, and lifting up his eyes, his lips stirred with such half-syllabled words as fathers breathe on high.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DISCOVERY.

DALIBARD had undertaken to get Lucretia from the house; in fact, her approaching marriage rendered necessary a communication with Mr. Parchmount, as executor to her uncle's will, relative to the transfer of her portion; and she had asked

Dalibard to accompany her thither; for her pride shrank from receiving the lawyer in the shabby parlour of the shabby lodging-house; she therefore, that evening, fixed the next day, before noon, for the visit. A carriage was hired for the occasion, and, when it drove off, Mr. Fielden took his children a walk to Primrose Hill, and called, as was agreed, on Mainwaring by the way.

The carriage had scarcely rattled fifty yards through the street when Dalibard fixed his eyes with deep and solemn commiseration on Lucretia. Hitherto, with masterly art, he had kept aloof from direct explanations with his pupil; he knew that she would distrust no one like himself. The plot was now ripened, and it was time for the main agent to conduct the catastrophe. The look was so expressive that Lucretia felt a chill at her heart, and could not help exclaiming, "What has happened? you have some terrible tidings to communicate!"

"I have indeed to say that which may, perhaps, cause you to hate me for ever; as we hate those who report our afflictions. I must endure this; I have struggled long between my indignation and my compassion. Rouse up your strong mind, and hear me. Mainwaring loves your sister!"

Lucretia uttered a cry that seemed scarcely to come from a human voice—

"No—no!" she gasped out, "do not tell me. I will hear no more—I will not believe you!"

With an inexpressible pity and softness in his tone, this man, whose career had given him such profound experience in the frailties of the human heart, continued:—"I do not ask you to believe me, Lucretia; I would not now speak, if you had not the opportunity to convince yourself; even those with whom you live are false to you; at this moment they have arranged all, for Mainwaring to steal, in your absence, to your sister; in a few moments more he will be with her; if you yourself would learn what passes between them, you have the power."

"I have—I have not—not—the courage; drive on—faster—faster."

Dalibard again was foiled. In this strange cowardice there was something so terrible, yet so touching, that it became sublime—it was the grasp of a drowning soul at the last plank.

"You are right, perhaps," he said, after a pause; and wisely forbearing all taunt and resistance, he left the heart to its own workings.

Suddenly, Lucretia caught at the check-string—"Stop," she exclaimed—"stop! I will not, I cannot endure this suspense to last through a life! I will learn the worst. Bid him drive back."

"We must descend and walk; you forget we must enter unsuspected;" and Dalibard, as the carriage stopped, opened the door, and let down the steps.

Lucretia recoiled, then pressing one hand to her heart, she descended without touching the arm held out to her.

Dalibard bade the coachman wait, and they walked back to the house.

"Yes, he may see her," exclaimed Lucretia, her face brightening. "Ah, *there* you have not deceived me; I see your stratagem—I despise it; I know she loves him; she has sought this interview. He is so mild and gentle, so fearful to give pain; he has consented, from pity—that is all. Is he not pledged to me? He, so candid, so ingenuous! There must be truth somewhere in the world. If he is false, where find truth? Dark man, must I look for it in you?—*you!*"

"It is not my truth I require you to test; I pretend not to truth universal; I can be true to one, as you may yet discover: but I own your belief is not impossible; my interest in you may have made me rash and unjust—what you may overhear, far from destroying, may confirm for ever your happiness. Would that it may be so!"

"It *must* be so," returned Lucretia, with a fearful gloom on her brow and in her accent: "I will interpret every word to my own salvation."

Dalibard's countenance changed, despite his usual control over it. He had set all his chances upon this cast, and it was more hazardous than he had deemed. He had counted too much upon the jealousy of common natures. After all

how little to the ear of one resolved to deceive herself might pass between these two young persons, meeting not to avow attachment, but to take courage from each other! What restraint might they impose on their feelings! Still the game must be played out.

As they now neared the house, Dalibard looked carefully round, lest they should encounter Mainwaring on his way to it. He had counted on arriving before the young man could get there.

"But," said Lucretia, breaking silence, with an ironical smile—"but (for your tender anxiety for me has, no doubt, provided all means and contrivance, all necessary aids to baseness and eavesdropping, that can assure my happiness) how am I to be present at this interview?"

"I have provided, as you say," answered Dalibard, in the tone of a man deeply hurt, "those means which I, who have found the world one foe and one traitor, deemed the best to distinguish falsehood from truth. I have arranged that we shall enter the house unsuspected. Mainwaring and your sister will be in the drawing-room—the room next to it will be vacant, as Mr. Fielden is from home; there is but a glass-door between the two chambers."

"Enough, enough!" and Lucretia turned round, and placed her hand lightly on the Provençal's arm. "The next hour will decide whether the means you suggest to learn truth and defend safety will be familiar or loathsome to me for life—will decide whether trust is a madness—whether you, my youth's teacher, are the wisest of men, or only the most dangerous."

"Believe me, or not, when I say, I would rather the decision should condemn me; for I, too, have need of confidence in men."

Nothing further was said; the dull street was quiet and desolate as usual. Dalibard had taken with him the key of the house door. The door opened noiselessly—they were in the house Mainwaring's cloak was in the hall; he had arrived a few moments before them. Dalibard pointed silently to that evidence in favour of his tale. Lucretia bowed her

head, but with a look that implied defiance; and (still without a word) she ascended the stairs, and entered the room appointed for concealment. But as she entered, at the further corner of the chamber she saw Mrs. Fielden seated—seated, remote and out of hearing. The good-natured woman had yielded to Mainwaring's prayer, and Susan's silent look that enforced it, to let their interview be unwitnessed. She did not perceive Lucretia till the last walked glidingly, but firmly, up to her, placed a burning hand on her lips, and whispered—"Hush, betray me not; my happiness for life—Susan's—his—are at stake; I must hear what passes; it is *my* fate that is deciding. Hush—I command!—for I have the right!"

Mrs. Fielden was awed and startled; and before she could recover even breath, Lucretia had quitted her side, and taken her post at the fatal door. She lifted the corner of the curtain from the glass panel, and looked in.

Mainwaring was seated at a little distance from Susan, whose face was turned from her. Mainwaring's countenance was in full view. But it was Susan's voice that met her ear; and though sweet and low, it was distinct, and even firm. It was evident from the words that the conference had but just begun.

"Indeed, Mr. Mainwaring, you have nothing to explain—nothing of which to accuse yourself. It was not for this, believe me"—and here Susan turned her face, and its aspect of heavenly innocence met the dry lurid eye of the unseen witness—"not for this, believe me, that I consented to see you. If I did so, it was only because I thought—because I feared from your manner, when we met at times, still more from your evident avoidance to meet me at all, that you were unhappy (for I know you kind and honest); unhappy at the thought that you had wounded me, and my heart could not bear that, nor, perhaps, my pride either. That you should have forgotten me——"

"Forgotten you!"

"That you should have been captivated" (continued Susan, in a more hurried tone) "by one so superior to me in all things as Lucretia, is very natural. I thought, then—thought only—that nothing could cloud your happiness but some reproach

of a conscience too sensitive. For this I have met you—met you without a thought which Lucretia would have a right to blame, could she read my heart; met you" (and the voice for the first time faltered), "that I might say, 'Be at peace: it is your sister that addresses you. Requite Lucretia's love—it is deep and strong; give her as she gives to you—a whole heart; and in your happiness, I, your sister—sister to both *I* shall be blest.'" With a smile inexpressibly touching and ingenuous, she held out her hand as she ceased. Mainwaring sprang forward, and, despite her struggle, pressed it to his lips—his heart.

"Oh," he exclaimed, in broken accents, which gradually became more clear and loud, "what—what have I lost!—lost for ever! No, no, I will be worthy of you! I do not—I dare not say that I love you still! I feel what I owe to Lucretia How I became first ensnared, infatuated; how, with your image graven so deeply here——"

"Mainwaring—Mr. Mainwaring—I must not hear you. Is this your promise?"

"Yes, you must hear me yet. How I became engaged to your sister—so different, indeed, from you—I start in amaze and bewilderment when I seek to conjecture. But so it was. For me she has forfeited fortune, rank—all which that proud, stern heart so prized and coveted. Heaven is my witness, how I have struggled to repay her affection with my own; if I cannot succeed, at least, all that faith and gratitude can give are hers. Yes; when I leave you, comforted by your forgiveness, your prayers, I shall have strength to tear you from my heart—it is my duty—my fate. With a firm step I will go to these abhorred nuptials. Oh, shudder not; turn not away. Forgive the word; but I must speak—my heart will out—yes, abhorred nuptials! Between my grave and the altar, would—would that I had a choice!"

From this burst, which in vain from time to time Susan had sought to check, Mainwaring was startled by an apparition which froze his veins, as a ghost from the grave. The door was thrown open, and Lucretia stood in the aperture—stood, gazing on him, face to face; and her own was so colourless, so rigid,

so locked in its livid and awful solemnity of aspect, that it was, indeed, as one risen from the dead.

Dismayed by the abrupt cry, and the changed face of her lover, Susan turned and beheld her sister. With the impulse of the pierced and loving heart, which divined all the agony inflicted, she sprang to Lucretia's side—she fell to the ground and clasped her knees.

"Do not heed—do not believe him: it is but the frenzy of a moment. He spoke but to deceive me—*me*, who loved him once! Mine alone—mine is the crime. He knows all your worth; pity—pity—pity on yourself, on him, on me!"

Lucretia's eyes fell with the glare of a fiend upon the imploring face lifted to her own. Her lips moved, but no sound was audible. At length she drew herself from her sister's clasp, and walked steadily up to Mainwaring. She surveyed him with a calm and cruel gaze, as if she enjoyed his shame and terror. Before, however, she spoke, Mrs. Fielden, who had watched, as one spellbound, Lucretia's movements, and, without hearing what had passed, had the full foreboding of what would ensue, but had not stirred till Lucretia herself terminated the suspense, and broke the charm of her awe,—before she spoke, Mrs. Fielden rushed in, and, giving vent to her agitation in loud sobs, as she threw her arms round Susan, who was still kneeling on the floor, brought something of grotesque to the more tragic and fearful character of the scene.

"My uncle was right; there is neither courage nor honour in the low-born! He, the schemer, too, is right. All hollow—all false!" Thus said Lucretia, with a strange sort of musing accent, at first scornful, at last only quietly abstracted. "Rise, sir," she then added, with her most imperious tone; "do you not hear your Susan weep?-do you fear in my presence to console her? Coward to her, as forsworn to me? Go, sir, you are free!"

"Hear me," faltered Mainwaring, attempting to seize her hand; "I do not ask you to forgive; but——"

"Forgive, sir!" interrupted Lucretia, rearing her head, and with a look of freezing and unspeakable majesty, "there is only one person here who needs a pardon; but her fault is inexpiable: it is the woman who stooped beneath her——"

With these words, hurled from her with a scorn which crushed while it galled, she mechanically drew round her form her black mantle; her eye glanced on the deep mourning of the garment, and her memory recalled all that love had cost her; but she added no other reproach. Slowly she turned away: passing Susan, who lay senseless in Mrs. Fielden's arms, she paused, and kissed her forehead.

"When she recovers, madam," she said to Mrs. Fielden, who was moved and astonished by this softness, "say that Lucretia Clavering uttered a vow, when she kissed the brow of William Mainwaring's future wife!"

Olivier Dalibard was still seated in the parlour below when Lucretia entered. Her face yet retained its almost unearthly rigidity and calm; but a sort of darkness had come over its ashen pallor—that shade so indescribable, which is seen in the human face, after long illness, a day or two before death. Dalibard was appalled, for he had too often seen that hue in the dying not to recognise it now. His emotion was sufficiently genuine to give more than usual earnestness to his voice and gesture, as he poured out every word that spoke sympathy and soothing. For a long time Lucretia did not seem to hear him: at last, her face softened—the ice broke.

"Motherless—friendless—lone—alone for ever—undone—undone!" she murmured. Her head sank upon the shoulder of her fearful counsellor, unconscious of its resting-place, and she burst into tears—tears which, perhaps, saved her reason or her life.

CHAPTER IX.

A SOUL WITHOUT HOPE.

WHEN Mr. Fielden returned home, Lucretia had quitted the house. She left a line for him in her usual bold, clear handwriting, referring him to his wife for explanation of the reasons that forbade a further residence beneath his roof. She had removed to an hotel, until she had leisure to arrange her

plans for the future. In a few months she should be of age; and, in the meanwhile, who now living claimed authority over her? For the rest, she added, "I repeat what I told Mr. Mainwaring, all engagement between us is at an end; he will not insult me either by letter or by visit. It is natural that I should at present shrink from seeing Susan Mivers. Hereafter, if permitted, I will visit Mrs. Mainwaring."

Though all had chanced as Mr. Fielden had desired (if, as he once half meditated, he had spoken to Lucretia herself),—though a marriage that could have brought happiness to none, and would have made the misery of two, was at an end, he yet felt a bitter pang, almost of remorse, when he learned what had occurred And Lucretia, before secretly disliked (if any one he could dislike), became dear to him at once, by sorrow and compassion. Forgetting every other person, he hurried to the hotel Lucretia had chosen; but her coldness deceived and her pride repelled him. She listened drily to all he said, and merely replied, "I feel only gratitude at my escape. Let this subject now close for ever."

Mr. Fielden left her presence with less anxious and commiserating feelings—perhaps all had chanced for the best. And, on returning home, his whole mind became absorbed in alarm for Susan. She was delirious, and in great danger; it was many weeks before she recovered. Meanwhile, Lucretia had removed into private apartments, of which she withheld the address. During this time, therefore, they lost sight of her.

If, amidst the punishments with which the sombre imagination of poets has diversified the Realm of the tortured Shadows, it had depicted some soul condemned to look evermore down into an abyss—all change to its gaze forbidden,—chasm upon chasm yawning deeper and deeper, darker and darker, endless and infinite; so that, eternally gazing, the soul became, as it were, a part of the abyss—such an image would symbol forth the state of Lucretia's mind.

It was not the mere desolation of one whom love has abandoned and betrayed. In the abyss were mingled inextricably together the gloom of the past and of the future—there, the broken fortunes, the crushed ambition, the ruin of the worldly expectations

long inseparable from her schemes; and amidst them, the angry shade of the more than father, whose heart she had wrung, and whose old age she had speeded to the grave. These sacrifices to love, while love was left to her, might have haunted her at moments, but a smile, a word, a glance banished the regret and the remorse. Now, love being razed out of life, the ruins of all else loomed dismal amidst the darkness; and a voice rose up, whispering, "Lo, fool, what thou hast lost because thou didst believe and love!" And this thought grasped together the two worlds of being—the what has been, and the what shall be. All hope seemed stricken from the future as a man strikes from the calculations of his income the returns from a property irrevocably lost. At her age but few of her sex have parted with religion, but even such mechanical faith as the lessons of her childhood, and the constrained conformities with Christian ceremonies, had instilled, had long since melted away in the hard scholastic scepticism of her fatal tutor—a scepticism which had won, with little effort, a reason delighting in the maze of doubt, and easily narrowed into the cramped and iron logic of disbelief, by an intellect that scorned to submit where it failed to comprehend. Nor had faith given place to those large moral truths from which philosophy has sought to restore the proud statue of Pagan Virtue as a substitute for the meek symbol of the Christian cross. By temperament unsocial—nor readily moved to the genial and benevolent -that absolute egotism in which Olivier Dalibard centred his dreary ethics seemed sanctioned to Lucretia by her studies into the motives of man and the history of the world. She had read the chronicles of states and the memoirs of statesmen, and seen how craft carries on the movements of an age. Those Viscontis, Castruccios, and Medici—those Richelieus, and Mazarins, and De Retzs—those Loyolas, and Mohammeds, and Cromwells—those Monks and Godolphins—those Marlboroughs and Walpoles—those founders of history, and dynasties, and sects—those leaders and dupers of men, greater or lesser, corrupters or corrupt—all standing out prominent and renowned from the guiltless and laurelless obscure—seemed to win, by the homage of posterity, the rewards that attend the deceivers of their time. By a superb arrogance

of generalisation, she transferred into private life, and the rule of commonplace actions, the policy that, to the abasement of honour, has so often triumphed in the guidance of states. Therefore, betimes, the whole frame of society was changed to her eye, from the calm aspect it wears to those who live united with their kind—she viewed all seemings with suspicion; and before she had entered the world, prepared to live in it as a conspirator in a city convulsed, spying and espied, schemed against and scheming—here the crown for the crafty, there the axe for the outwitted.

But her love, for love is trust, had led her half way forth from this maze of the intellect. That fair youth of inexperience and candour, which seemed to bloom out in the face of her betrothed—his very shrinking from the schemes so natural to her, that to her they seemed even innocent—his apparent reliance on mere masculine ability, with the plain aids of perseverance and honesty—all had an attraction that plucked her back from herself. If she clung to him, firmly, blindly, credulously, it was not as the lover alone. In the lover, she beheld the good angel. Had he only died to her—still the angel smile would have survived and warned. But the man had not died—the angel itself had deceived;—the wings could uphold her no more—they had touched the mire, and were sullied with the soil; with the stain, was forfeited the strength. All was deceit and hollowness and treachery. Lone again in the universe, rose the eternal *I*. So down into the abyss she looked, depth upon depth, and the darkness had no relief, and the deep had no end.

Olivier Dalibard alone, of all she knew, was admitted to her seclusion. He played his part as might be expected from the singular patience and penetration which belonged to the genius of his character. He forbore the most distant allusion to his attachment or his hopes. He evinced sympathy rather, by imitating her silence, than attempts to console. When he spoke, he sought to interest her mind, more than to heal directly the deep wounds of her heart. There is always, to the afflicted, a certain charm in the depth and bitterness of eloquent misanthropy. And Dalibard, who professed not to be a man-hater, but a world-scorner, had powers of language

and of reasoning commensurate with his astute intellect and his profound research. His society became not only a relief, it grew almost a want, to that stern sorrower. But, whether alarmed or not by the influence she felt him gradually acquiring, or whether, through some haughty desire to rise once more aloft from the state of her rival and her lover, she made one sudden effort to grasp at the rank from which she had been hurled. The only living person, whose connection could reopen to her the great world, with its splendours and its scope to ambition, was Charles Vernon. She scarcely admitted to her own mind the idea that she would now accept, if offered, the suit she had before despised—she did not even contemplate the renewal of that suit—though there was something in the gallant and disinterested character of Vernon which should have made her believe he would regard their altered fortunes rather as a claim on his honour than a release to his engagements. But hitherto no communication had passed between them, and this was strange if he retained the same intentions which he had announced at Laughton. Putting aside, we say, however, all such considerations, Vernon had sought her friendship, called her "cousin," enforced the distant relationship between them. Not as lover, but as kinsman, the only kinsman of her own rank she possessed—his position in the world, his connections, his brilliant range of acquaintance, made his counsel for her future plans, his aid in the re-establishment of her consequence (if not as wealthy, still as well-born), and her admission amongst her equals, of price and value. It was worth sounding the depth of the friendship he had offered, even if his love had passed away with the fortune on which doubtless it had been based.

She took a bold step—she wrote to Vernon—not even to allude to what had passed between them: her pride forbade such unwomanly vulgarity. The baseness that was in her took at least a more delicate exterior. She wrote to him simply and distantly, to state that there were some books and trifles of hers left at Laughton, which she prized beyond their trivial value; and to request, as she believed him to be absent from the hall, permission to call at her old home, in

her way to a visit in a neighbouring county, and point out to whomsoever he might appoint to meet her, the effects she deemed herself privileged to claim. The letter was one merely of business, but it was sufficient test of the friendly feelings of her former suitor.

She sent this letter to Vernon's house in London, and the next day came the answer.

Vernon, we must own, entirely sympathised with Sir Miles, in the solemn injunctions the old man had bequeathed. Immediately after the death of one to whom we owe gratitude and love, all his desires take a sanctity irresistible and ineffable. We adopt his affection, his dislikes, his obligations, and his wrongs. And after he had read the copy of Lucretia's letter, inclosed to him by Sir Miles, the conquest the poor baronet had made over resentment and vindictive emotion, the evident effort at passionless justice with which he had provided becomingly for his niece, while he cancelled her claims as his heiress, had filled Vernon with a reverence for his wishes and decisions, that silenced all those inclinations to over-generosity which an unexpected inheritance is apt to create towards the less fortunate expectants; nevertheless, Lucretia's direct application, her formal appeal to his common courtesy as host and kinsman, perplexed greatly a man ever accustomed to a certain chivalry towards the sex: the usual frankness of his disposition suggested, however, plain dealing as the best escape from his dilemma, and therefore he answered thus:—

"MADAM,—Under other circumstances it would have given me no common pleasure to place the house that you so long inhabited again at your disposal. And I feel so painfully the position which my refusal of your request inflicts upon me, that rather than resort to excuses and pretexts, which, while conveying an impression of my sincerity, would seem almost like an insult to yourself, I venture frankly to inform you, that it was the dying wish of my lamented kinsman, in consequence of a letter which came under his eye, that the welcome you had hitherto received at Laughton should be withdrawn. Pardon me, Madam, if I express myself thus

bluntly—it is somewhat necessary to the vindication of my character in your eyes, both as regards the honour of your request and my tacit resignation of hopes, fervently, but too presumptuously, entertained. In this most painful candour, Heaven forbid that I should add wantonly to your self-reproaches for the fault of youth and inexperience, which I should be the last person to judge rigidly, and which, had Sir Miles's life been spared, you would doubtless have amply repaired. The feelings which actuated Sir Miles in his latter days might have changed; but the injunction those feelings prompted I am bound to respect.

"For the mere matter of business, on which you have done me the honour to address me, I have only to say, that any orders you may give to the steward, or transmit through any person you may send to the hall, with the regard to the effects you so naturally desire to claim, shall be implicitly obeyed.

"And believe me, Madam (though I do not presume to add those expressions, which might rather heighten the offence I fear this letter will give you), that the assurance of your happiness in the choice you have made, and which now no obstacle can oppose, will considerably lighten the pain with which I shall long recall my ungracious reply to your communication.

"I have the honour to be, &c. &c.,

"C. VERNON ST. JOHN."

"BROOK STREET, *Dec. 28th*, 18—."

The receipt of such a letter could hardly add to the profounder grief which preyed in the innermost core of Lucretia's heart, but, in repelling the effort she had made to distract that grief by ambition, it blackened the sullen despondency with which she regarded the future. As the insect in the hollow snare of the ant-lion, she felt that there was no footing up the sides of the cave into which she had fallen—the sand gave way to the step. But despondeny in her, brought no meekness—the cloud did not descend in rain;—resting over the horizon, its darkness was tinged with the fires which it fed. The heart, already so embittered, was stung and mortified into intolerable shame

and wrath. From the home that should have been hers, in which, as acknowledged heiress, she had smiled down on the ruined Vernon, she was banished by him who had supplanted her, as one worthless and polluted. Though, from motives of obvious delicacy, Vernon had not said expressly that he had seen the letter to Mainwaring, the unfamiliar and formal tone which he assumed, indirectly declared it, and betrayed the impression it had made, in spite of his reserve. A living man then was in possession of a secret which justified his disdain, and that man was master of Laughton! The suppressed rage which embraced the lost lover, extended darkly over this witness to that baffled and miserable love. But what availed rage against either? Abandoned and despoiled, she was powerless to avenge. It was at this time, when her prospects seemed most dark, her pride was most crushed, and her despair of the future at its height, that she turned to Dalibard as the only friend left to her under the sun. Even the vices she perceived in him became merits, for they forbade him to despise her. And now, this man rose suddenly into another and higher aspect of character: of late, though equally deferential to her, there had been something more lofty in his mien, more assured on his brow; gleams of a secret satisfaction, even of a joy, that he appeared anxious to suppress, as ill in harmony with her causes for dejection, broke out in his looks and words. At length, one day, after some preparatory hesitation, he informed her that he was free to return to France—that even without the peace between England and France, which (known under the name of the Peace of Amiens) had been just concluded, he should have crossed the Channel. The advocacy and interest of friends, whom he had left at Paris, had already brought him under the special notice of the wonderful man who then governed France, and who sought to unite in its service every description and variety of intellect. He should return to France, and then—why, then, the ladder was on the walls of Fortune and the foot planted on the step! As he spoke, confidently and sanguinely, with the *verve* and assurance of an able man who sees clear the path to his goal, as he sketched with rapid

precision the nature of his prospects and his hopes, all that subtle wisdom which had before often seemed but vague and general, took practical shape and interest, thus applied to the actual circumstances of men; the spirit of intrigue, which seemed mean when employed on mean things, swelled into statemanship and masterly genius to the listener, when she saw it linked with the large objects of masculine ambition. Insensibly, therefore, her attention became earnest—her mind aroused. The vision of a field, afar from the scenes of her humiliation and despair—a field for energy, stratagem, and contest—invited her restless intelligence. As Dalibard had profoundly calculated, there was no new channel for her affections—the source was dried up, and the parched sands heaped over it; but while the heart lay dormant, the mind rose, sleepless, chafed, and perturbed. Through the mind, he indirectly addressed and subtly wooed her.

"Such," he said, as he rose to take leave, "such is the career, to which I could depart with joy if I did not depart alone!"

"Alone!" that word, more than once that day, Lucretia repeated to herself—"alone!"—and what career was left to her?—she, *too*, alone!

In certain stages of great grief our natures yearn for excitement. This has made some men gamblers; it has made even women drunkards—it had effect over the serene calm and would-be divinity of the poet-sage. When his son dies, Goethe does not mourn—he plunges into the absorption of a study uncultivated before. But, in the great contest of life, in the whirlpool of actual affairs, the stricken heart finds all—the gambling, the inebriation, and the study.

We pause here. We have pursued long enough that patient analysis, with all the food for reflection that it possibly affords, to which we were insensibly led on by an interest, dark and fascinating, that grew more and more upon us, as we proceeded in our research into the early history of a person fated to pervert no ordinary powers into no commonplace guilt.

The charm is concluded—the circle closed round—the self-guided-seeker after knowledge has gained the fiend for the familiar.

CHAPTER X.

THE RECONCILIATION BETWEEN FATHER AND SON.

WE pass over an interval of some months.

A painter stood at work at the easel; his human model before him. He was employed on a nymph—the Nymph Galatea. The subject had been taken before by Salvator, whose genius found all its elements in the wild rocks, gnarled fantastic trees, and gushing waterfalls of the landscape—in the huge ugliness of Polyphemus the lover—in the grace and suavity and unconscious abandonment of the nymph, sleeking her tresses dripping from the bath. The painter, on a larger canvas (for Salvator's picture, at least the one we have seen, is among the small sketches of the great artistic creator of the romantic and grotesque) had transferred the subject of the master; but he had left subordinate the landscape and the giant, to concentrate all his art on the person of the Nymph. Middle-aged was the painter, in truth; but he looked old. His hair, though long, was grey and thin; his face was bloated by intemperance; and his hand trembled much, though from habit no trace of the tremor was visible in his work.

A boy, near at hand, was also employed on the same subject, with a rough chalk and a bold freedom of touch. He was sketching *his* design of a Galatea and Polyphemus on the wall; for the wall was only whitewashed, and covered already with the multiform vagaries whether of master or pupils; caricatures and demigods, hands and feet, torsos and monsters, and Venuses—the rude creations, all mutilated, jarring, and mingled, gave a cynical, mocking, devil-may-care kind of aspect to the sanctum of art. It was like the dissection-room of the anatomist. The boy's sketch was more in harmony with the walls of the studio than the canvas of the master. His nymph, accurately drawn from the undressed proportions of the model down to the waist, terminated in the scales of a fish. The forked branches of the trees stretched weird and imp-like as the hands of skeletons.

Polyphemus, peering over the rocks, had the leer of a demon; and in his gross features there was a certain distorted, hideous likeness of the grave and symmetrical lineaments of Olivier Dalibard.

All around was slovenly, squalid, and poverty-stricken; rickety, worn-out, rush-bottom chairs; unsold, unfinished pictures, pell-mell in the corner, covered with dust; broken casts of plaster; a lay-figure battered in its basket-work arms, with its doll-like face, all smudged and besmeared; a pot of porter and a noggin of gin on a stained deal table, accompanied by two or three broken, smoke-blackened pipes, some tattered song-books, and old numbers of the *Covent Garden Magazine*, betrayed the tastes of the artist, and accounted for the shaking hand and the bloated form. A jovial, disorderly, vagrant dog of a painter was Tom Varney!—a bachelor, of course—humorous and droll—a boon companion, and a terrible borrower: clever enough in his calling; with pains and some method, he had easily gained subsistence and established a name; but he had one trick that soon ruined him in the business part of his profession. He took a fourth of his price in advance; and having once clutched the money, the poor customer might go hang for his picture! The only things Tom Varney ever fairly completed were those for which no order had been given; for in them, somehow or other, his fancy became interested, and on them he lavished the gusto which he really possessed. But the subjects were rarely saleable. Nymphs and deities undraperied have few worshippers in England amongst the buyers of "furniture pictures." And, to say truth, nymph and deity had usually a very equivocal look; and if they came from the gods, you would swear it was the gods of the galleries of Drury. When Tom Varney sold a picture, he lived upon clover till the money was gone. But the poorer and less steady alumni of the rising school, especially those at war with the Academy from which Varney was excluded, pitied, despised, yet liked and courted him withal. In addition to his good qualities of blithe song-singer, droll story-teller, and stanch Bacchanalian, Tom Varney was liberally good-natured in communicating instruction really valuable to those who knew how to avail

themselves of a knowledge he had made almost worthless to himself. He was a shrewd, though good-natured critic, had many little secrets of colouring and composition, which an invitation to supper, or the loan of ten shillings, was sufficient to bribe from him. Ragged, out of elbows, unshaven, and slipshod, he still had his set, amongst the gay and the young —a precious master, a profitable set for his nephew, Master Honoré Gabriel! But the poor rapscallion had a heart larger than many honest, painstaking men. As soon as Gabriel had found him out, and entreated refuge from his fear of his father, the painter clasped him tight in his great slovenly arms, sold a Venus half-price to buy him a bed and a washstand, and swore a tremendous oath, "that the son of his poor guillotined sister should share the last shilling in his pocket—the last drop in his can."

Gabriel, fresh from the cheer of Laughton, and spoiled by the prodigal gifts of Lucretia, had little gratitude for shillings and porter. Nevertheless, he condescended to take what he could get, while he sighed, from the depths of a heart in which cupidity and vanity had become the predominant rulers, for a destiny more worthy his genius, and more in keeping with the sphere from which he had descended.

The boy finished his sketch, with an impudent wink at the model, flung himself back on his chair, folded his arms, cast a discontented glance at the whitened seams of the sleeves, and soon seemed lost in his own reflections. The painter worked on in silence. The model, whom Gabriel's wink had aroused, half-flattered, half-indignant for a moment, lapsed into a doze. Outside the window, you heard the song of a canary—a dingy, smoke-coloured canary—that seemed shedding its plumes, for they were as ragged as the garments of its master; still it contrived to sing—trill-trill-trill-trill-trill, as blithely as if free in its native woods, or pampered by fair hands in a gilded cage. The bird was the only true artist there; it sang, as the poet sings, to obey its nature and vent its heart. Trill-trill-trillela-la-la-trill-trill, went the song—louder, gayer than usual—for there was a gleam of April sunshine struggling over the roof-tops. The song at length roused up Gabriel; he turned his chair

round, laid his head on one side, listened, and looked curiously at the bird.

At length, an idea seemed to cross him: he rose, opened the window, drew in the cage, placed it on the chair, then took up one of his uncle's pipes, walked to the fireplace, and thrust the shank of the pipe into the bars. When it was red-hot, he took it out by the bowl, having first protected his hand from the heat by wrapping round it his handkerchief; this done, he returned to the cage. His movements had wakened up the dozing model. She eyed them at first with dull curiosity, then with lively suspicion; and presently starting up with an exclamation such as no novelist but Fielding dare put into the mouth of a female—much less a nymph of such renown as Galatea—she sprang across the room, well-nigh upsetting easel and painter, and fastened firm hold on Gabriel's shoulders.

"The varment!" she cried, vehemently; "the good-for-nothing varment! If it had been a jay, or a nasty raven, well and good!—but a poor little canary!"

"Hoity-toity! what are you about, nephew? What's the matter?" said Tom Varney, coming up to the strife. And, indeed, it was time; for Gabriel's teeth were set in his cat-like jaws, and the glowing point of the pipe-shank was within an inch of the cheek of the model.

"What's the matter?" replied Gabriel, suddenly; "why, I was only going to try a little experiment."

"An experiment? not on my canary, poor dear little thing!—the hours and hours that creature has strained its throat to say—'sing and be merry,' when I had not a rap in my pocket! It would have made a stone feel to hear it."

"But I think I can make it sing much better than ever—only just let me try! They say that if you put out the eyes of a canary, it——" Gabriel was not allowed to conclude his sentence; for here rose that clamour of horror and indignation from both painter and model which usually greets the announcement of every philosophical discovery—at least, when about to be practically applied; and in the midst of the hubbub, the poor little canary, who had been fluttering about the cage to escape the hand of the benevolent operator, set up no longer

the cheerful trill—trillela-la-trill, but a scared and heartbreaking chirp—a shrill, terrified twit-twit-twitter-twit.

"Damn the bird!—hold your tongues!" cried Gabriel Varney, reluctantly giving way; but still eying the bird with the scientific regret with which the illustrious Majendie might contemplate a dog which some brute of a master refused to disembowel for the good of the colics of mankind.

The model seized on the cage, shut the door of the wires, and carried it off. Tom Varney drained the rest of his porter, and wiped his forehead with the sleeve of his coat.

"And to use my pipe for such cruelty! Boy, boy, I could not have believed it! But you were not in earnest—oh, no, impossible! Sukey, my love—Galatea, the divine—calm thy breast; Cupid did but jest:

"'Cupid is the God of Laughter,
Quip, and jest, and joke, sir.'"

"If you don't whip the little wretch within an inch of his life, he'll have a gallows end on't," replied Galatea.

"Go, Cupid, go and kiss Galatea, and make your peace:

"'Oh, leave a kiss within the cup,
And I'll not ask for wine!'

And 'tis no use asking for wine, or for gin either—not a drop in the noggin!"

All this while, Gabriel, disdaining the recommendations held forth to him, was employed in brushing his jacket with a very mangy-looking brush; and when he had completed that operation he approached his uncle, and coolly thrust his hands into that gentleman's waistcoat-pockets.

"Uncle, what have you done with those seven shillings? I am going out to spend the day."

"If you give them to him, Tom, I'll scratch your eyes out,' cried the model; "and then we'll see how *you'll* sing. Whip him, I say—whip him!"

But, strange to say, this liberty of the boy's quite reopened the heart of his uncle—it was a pleasure to him, who put his hands so habitually into other people's pockets, to be invested with the novel grandeur of the man sponged upon. "That's

right, Cupid, son of Cytherea; all's common property amongst friends. Seven shillings, I have 'em not. 'They now are five who once were seven;' but such as they are, we'll share.

"'Let old Timotheus yield the prize,
Or both divide the crown.'"

"Crowns bear no division, my uncle," said Gabriel, drily—and he pocketed the five shillings. Then, having first secured his escape, by gaining the threshold, he suddenly seized one of the rickety chairs by its leg, and, regardless of the gallantries due to the sex, sent it right against the model, who was shaking her fist at him. A scream, and a fall, and a sharp twit from the cage, which was hurled nearly into the fireplace, told that the missive had taken effect. Gabriel did not wait for the probable reaction; he was in the streets in an instant.

"This won't do," he muttered to himself; "there is no getting on here. Foolish drunken vagabond! no good to be got from him. My father is terrible, but he will make his way in the world. Umph! if I were but his match—and why not? I am brave, and he is not. There's fun, too, in danger."

Thus musing, he took his way to Dalibard's lodgings. His father was at home. Now, though they were but lodgings, and the street not in fashion, Olivier Dalibard's apartments had an air of refinement, and even elegance, that contrasted both the wretched squalor of the abode Gabriel had just left, and the meanness of Dalibard's former quarters in London. The change seemed to imply that the Provençal had already made some way in the world. And, truth to say, at all times, even in the lowest ebb of his fortunes, there was that indescribable neatness and formality of precision about all the exterior seemings of the *ci-devant* friend of the prim Robespierre which belong to those in whom order and method are strongly developed—qualities which give even to neediness a certain dignity. As the room and its owner met the eye of Gabriel, on whose senses all externals had considerable influence, the ungrateful young ruffian recalled the kind, tattered, slovenly uncle, whose purse he had just emptied, without one feeling milder than disgust. Olivier Dalibard, always careful, if simple, in his dress, with his brow

of grave intellectual power, and his mien imposing, not only from its calm, but from that nameless refinement which rarely fails to give to the student the air of a gentleman—Olivier Dalibard he might dread—he might even detest; but he was not ashamed of him.

"I said I would visit you, sir, if you would permit me," said Gabriel, in a tone of respect, not unmingled with some defiance, as if in doubt of his reception.

The father's slow full eye, so different from the sidelong furtive glance of Lucretia, turned on the son, as if to penetrate his very heart.

"You look pale and haggard, child: you are fast losing your health and beauty. Good gifts these, not to be wasted before they can be duly employed. But you have taken your choice. Be an artist—copy Tom Varney, and prosper."

Gabriel remained silent, with his eyes on the floor.

"You come in time for my farewell," resumed Dalibard. "It is a comfort, at least, that I leave your youth so honourably protected. I am about to return to my country—my career is once more before me!"

"Your country—to Paris?"

"There are fine pictures in the Louvre—a good place to inspire an artist!"

"You go alone, father!"

"You forget, young gentleman, you disown me as father! Go alone! I thought I told you, in the times of our confidence, that I should marry Lucretia Clavering. I rarely fail in my plans. She has lost Laughton, it is true, but ten thousand pounds will make a fair commencement to fortune, even at Paris. Well, what do you want with me, worthy godson of Honoré Gabriel Mirabeau?"

"Sir, if you will let me, I will go with you."

Dalibard shaded his brow with his hand, and reflected on the filial proposal. On the one hand, it might be convenient, and would certainly be economical to rid himself evermore of the mutinous son who had already thrown off his authority; on the other hand, there was much in Gabriel, mutinous and even menacing as he had lately become, that promised an unscrupulous

tool or a sharp-witted accomplice, with interests that every year the ready youth would more and more discover were bound up in his plotting father's. This last consideration, joined, if not to affection, still to habit—to the link between blood and blood, which even the hardest find it difficult to sever—prevailed. He extended his pale hand to Gabriel, and said, gently—

"I will take you, if we rightly understand each other. Once again in my power, I might constrain you to my will, it is true. But I rather confer with you as man to man than as man to boy."

"It is the best way," said Gabriel, firmly.

"I will use no harshness—inflict no punishment, unless, indeed, amply merited by stubborn disobedience or wilful deceit. But if I meet with these, better rot on a dunghill than come with me! I ask implicit confidence in all my suggestions, prompt submission to all my requests. Grant me but these, and I promise to consult your fortune as my own—to gratify your tastes as far as my means will allow—to grudge not your pleasures; and, when the age for ambition comes, to aid your rise if I rise myself; nay, if well contented with you, to remove the blot from your birth, by acknowledging and adopting you formally as my son."

"Agreed! and I thank you," said Gabriel. "And Lucretia is going; oh, I so long to see her!"

"See her—not yet; but next week."

"Do not fear that I should let out about the letter. I should betray myself if I did," said the boy, bluntly betraying his guess at his father's delay.

The evil scholar smiled.

"You will do well to keep it secret for your own sake; for mine, I should not fear. Gabriel, go back now to your master—you do right, like the rats, to run from the falling house. Next week, I will send for you, Gabriel!"

Not, however, back to the studio went the boy. He sauntered leisurely through the gayest streets, eyed the shops, and the equipages, the fair women, and the well-dressed men—eyed with envy, and longings, and visions of pomps and vanities to come; then, when the day began to close, he sought out a young

painter, the wildest and maddest of the crew to whom his uncle had presented their future comrade and rival, and went with this youth, at half-price, to the theatre, not to gaze on the actors or study the play, but to stroll in the saloon. A supper in the *Finish* completed the void in his pockets, and concluded his day's rank experience of life. By the grey dawn he stole back to his bed, and as he laid himself down, he thought with avid pleasure of Paris, its gay gardens, and brilliant shops, and crowded streets; he thought, too, of his father's calm confidence of success, of the triumph that already had attended his wiles —a confidence and a triumph which, exciting his reverence and rousing his emulation, had decided his resolution. He thought, too, of Lucretia, with something of affection, recalled her praises and bribes, her frequent mediation with his father, and felt that they should have need of each other. Oh, no, he never would tell her of the snare laid at Guy's Oak—never, not even if incensed with his father! An instinct told him that that offence could never be forgiven, and that, henceforth, Lucretia's was a destiny bound up in his own. He thought, too, of Dalibard's warning and threat. But, with fear itself, came a strange excitement of pleasure—to grapple, if necessary, he a mere child, with such a man!—his heart swelled at the thought. So, at last he fell asleep, and dreamed that he saw his mother's trunkless face dripping gore, and frowning on him—dreamed that he heard her say: "Goest thou to the scene of my execution only to fawn upon my murderer?" Then a night-mare of horrors, of scaffolds, and executioners, and grinning mobs, and agonised faces, came on him—dark, confused and indistinct. And he woke, with his hair standing on end, and heard below, in the rising sun, the merry song of the poor canary—trill-lill-lill, trill-trill-lill-lill-la! Did he feel glad that his cruel hand had been stayed?

EPILOGUE TO PART THE FIRST.

It is a year since the November day on which Lucretia Clavering quitted the roof of Mr. Fielden. And first we must recall the eye of the reader to the old-fashioned terrace at Laughton; the jutting porch, the quaint balustrades, the broad, dark, changeless cedars on the lawn beyond. The day is calm, clear, and mild, for November in the country is often a gentle month. On that terrace walked Charles Vernon, now known by his new name of St. John. Is it the change of name that has so changed the person? Can the wand of the Herald's Office have filled up the hollows of the cheek, and replaced by elastic vigour the listless languor of the tread? No: there is another and a better cause for that healthful change. Mr. Vernon St. John is not alone—a fair companion leans on his arm. See, she pauses to press closer to his side, gaze on his face, and whisper, "We did well to have hope and faith!"

The husband's faith had not been so unshaken as his Mary's, and a slight blush passed over his cheek as he thought of his concession to Sir Miles's wishes, and his overtures to Lucretia Clavering. Still that fault had been fairly acknowledged to his wife, and she felt, the moment she had spoken, that she had committed an indiscretion; nevertheless, with an arch touch of womanly malice, she added, softly,—

"And Miss Clavering, you persist in saying, was not really handsome?"

"My love," replied the husband, gravely, "you would oblige me by not recalling the very painful recollections connected with that name. Let it never be mentioned in this house."

Lady Mary bowed her graceful head in submission—she understood Charles's feelings. For though he had not shown her Sir Miles's letter and its inclosure, he had communicated enough to account for the unexpected heritage, and to lessen his wife's compassion for the disappointed heiress. Nevertheless, she comprehended that her husband felt an uneasy twinge at the idea that he was compelled to act hardly to the one

whose hopes he had supplanted. Lucretia's banishment from Laughton was a just humiliation, but it humbled a generous heart to inflict the sentence. Thus, on all accounts, the remembrance of Lucretia was painful and unwelcome to the successor of Sir Miles. There was a silence—Lady Mary pressed her husband's hand.

"It is strange," said he, giving vent to his thoughts at that tender sign of sympathy in his feeling—"strange that, after all, she did not marry Mainwaring, but fixed her choice on that subtle Frenchman. But she has settled abroad now, perhaps for life—a great relief to my mind. Yes, let us never recur to her."

"Fortunately," said Lady Mary, with some hesitation, "she does not seem to have created much interest here. The poor seldom name her to me, and our neighbours only with surprise at her marriage. In another year she will be forgotten!"

Mr. St. John sighed. Perhaps he felt how much more easily he had been forgotten, were he the banished one, Lucretia the possessor! His light nature, however, soon escaped from all thoughts and sources of annoyance, and he listened with complacent attention to Lady Mary's gentle plans for the poor, and the children's school, and the cottages that ought to be repaired, and the labourers that ought to be employed. For, though it may seem singular, Vernon St. John, insensibly influenced by his wife's meek superiority, and corrected by her pure companionship, had begun to feel the charm of innocent occupations;—more, perhaps, than if he had been accustomed to the larger and loftier excitements of life, and missed that stir of intellect which is the element of those who have warred in the democracy of letters, or contended for the leadership of states. He had begun already to think that the country was no such exile after all. Naturally benevolent, he had taught himself to share the occupations his Mary had already found in the busy "luxury of doing good," and to conceive that brotherhood of charity which usually unites the lord of the village with its poor.

"I think, what with hunting once a week—(I will not venture more till my pain in the side is quite gone),—and with the help

of some old friends at Christmas, we can get through the winter very well, Mary."

"Ah, those old friends! I dread them more than the hunting!"

"But we'll have your grave father, and your dear, precise, excellent mother to keep us in order. And if I sit more than half an hour after dinner, the old butler shall pull me out by the ears. Mary, what do you say to thinning the grove yonder? We shall get a better view of the landscape beyond. No, hang it! dear old Sir Miles loved his trees better than the prospect—I won't lop a bough. But that avenue we are planting will be certainly a noble improvement——"

"Fifty years hence, Charles!"

"It is our duty to think of posterity," answered the *ci-devant* spendthrift, with a gravity that was actually pompous. "But hark! is that two o'clock? Three, by Jove! How time flies! and my new bullocks that I was to see at two! Come down to the farm, that's my own Mary. Ah, your fine ladies are not such bad housewives after all!"

"And your fine gentlemen——"

"Capital farmers! I had no idea till last week that a prize ox was so interesting an animal. One lives to learn. Put me in mind, by the by, to write to Coke about his sheep."

"This way, dear Charles; we can go round by the village, and see poor Ponto and Dash."

The tears rushed to Mr. St. John's eyes. "If poor Sir Miles could have known you!" he said, with a sigh; and though the gardeners were at work on the lawn, he bowed his head and kissed the blushing cheek of his wife as heartily as if he had been really a farmer.

From the terrace at Laughton, turn to the humbler abode of our old friend the Vicar—the same day, the same hour. Here also the scene is without doors—we are in the garden of the vicarage; the children are playing at hide-and-seek amongst the espaliers, which screen the winding gravel-walks from the esculents more dear to Ceres than to Flora. The Vicar is seated in his little parlour, from which a glazed door admits into the garden. The door is now open, and the good man

has paused from his work (he had just discovered a new emendation in the first chorus of the *Medea*), to look out at the rosy faces that gleam to and fro across the scene. His wife, with a basket in her hand, is standing without the door, but a little aside, not to obstruct the view.

"It does one's heart good to see them!" said the Vicar; "little dears!"

"Yes, they ought to be dear at this time of the year," observed Mrs. Fielden, who was absorbed in the contents of the basket.

"And so fresh!"

"Fresh, indeed;—how different from London! In London they were not fit to be seen;—as old as—I am sure I can't guess how old they were. But you see here they are new laid every morning!"

"My dear!" said Mr. Fielding, opening his eyes—"new laid every morning!"

"Two dozen and four."

"Two dozen and four! What on earth are you talking about, Mrs. Fielden?"

"Why, the eggs, to be sure, my love!"

"Oh!" said the Vicar, "two dozen and four!—you alarmed me a little; 'tis of no consequence—only my foolish mistake. Always prudent and saving, my dear Sarah; just as if poor Sir Miles had not left us that munificent fortune, I may call it."

"It will not go very far when we have our young ones to settle. And—David is very extravagant already: he has torn such a hole in his jacket!"

At this moment, up the gravel-walk, two young persons came in sight. The children darted across them, whooping and laughing, and vanished in the further recess of the garden.

"All is for the best—blind mortals that we are! all is for the best!" said the Vicar, musingly, as his eyes rested upon the approaching pair.

"Certainly, my love; you are always right, and it is wicked to grumble. *Still*, if you saw what a hole it was—past patching, I fear!"

"Look round!" said Mr. Fielden, benevolently. "How we grieved for them both: how wroth we were with William—how sad for Susan! And now see them—they will be the better man and wife for their trial!"

"Has Susan then consented? I was almost afraid she never would consent. How often have I been almost angry with her, poor lamb! when I have heard her accuse herself of causing her sister's unhappiness, and declare with sobs that she felt it a crime to think of William Mainwaring as a husband."

"I trust I have reasoned her out of a morbid sensibility, which, while it could not have rendered Lucretia the happier, must have insured the wretchedness of herself and William. But if Lucretia had not married, and so for ever closed the door on William's repentance (that is, supposing he *did* repent), I believe poor Susan would rather have died of a broken heart than have given her hand to Mainwaring."

"It was an odd marriage of that proud young lady's, after all," said Mrs. Fielden; "so much older than she—a foreigner, too!"

"But he is a very pleasant man, and they have known each other so long. I did not, however, quite like a sort of cunning he showed, when I came to reflect on it, in bringing Lucretia back to the house; it looks as if he had laid a trap for her from the first."

"Ten thousand pounds!—a great catch for a foreigner!" observed Mrs. Fielden, with the shrewd instinct of her sex; and then she added, in the spirit of a prudent sympathy equally characteristic: "But I think you say Mr. Parchmount persuaded her to allow half to be settled on herself. That will be a hold on him."

"A bad hold, if that be all, Sarah. There is a better—he is a learned man, and a scholar. Scholars are naturally domestic, and make good husbands."

"But you know he must be a papist!" said Mrs. Fielden.

"Umph!" muttered the Vicar, irresolutely.

"While the worthy couple were thus conversing, Susan and her lover, not having finished their conference, had turned back through the winding walk.

"Indeed," said William, drawing her arm closer to his side, "these scruples—these fears—are cruel to me as well as to yourself. If you were no longer existing, I could be nothing to your sister. Nay, even were she not married, you must know enough of her pride to be assured that I can retain no place in her affections. What has chanced was not our crime. Perhaps Heaven designed to save not only us, but herself, from the certain misery of nuptials so inauspicious!"

"If she would but answer one of my letters!" sighed Susan; "or if I could but know that she were happy and contented!"

"Your letters must have miscarried—you are not sure even of her address. Rely upon it, she is happy. Do you think that she would a second time 'have stooped beneath her'"—Mainwaring's lip writhed as he repeated that phrase—"if her feelings had not been involved? I would not wrong your sister,—I shall ever feel gratitude for the past, and remorse for my own shameful weakness; still, I must think that the nature of her attachment to me was more ardent than lasting."

"Ah, William! how can you know her heart?"

"By comparing it with yours. Oh, there indeed I may anchor my faith! Susan, we were formed for each other! Our natures are alike—save that yours, despite its surpassing sweetness, has greater strength in its simple candour. You will be my guide to good. Without you I should have no aim in life,—no courage to front the contests of this world. Ah, this hand trembles still!"

"William, William, I cannot repress a foreboding—a superstition! At night I am haunted with that pale face, as I saw it last—pale with suppressed despair. Oh, if ever Lucretia could have need of us—need of our services, our affections,—if we could but repair the grief we have caused her!"

Susan's head sank on her lover's shoulder. She had said "need of *us*"—"need of *our* services." In those simple monosyllables the union was pledged—the identity of their lots in the dark urn was implied.

From this scene turn again,—the slide shifts in the lantern—we are at Paris. In the ante-chamber at the Tuileries a crowd of expectant courtiers and adventurers gaze upon a figure who

passes with modest and downcast eyes through the throng; he has just left the closet of the First Consul.

"*Par Dieu!*" said B——, "power, like misery, makes us acquainted with strange bedfellows. I should like to hear what the First Consul can have to say to Olivier Dalibard."

Fouché, who at that period was scheming for the return to his old dignities of minister of police, smiled slightly, and answered, "In a time when the air is filled with daggers, one who was familiar with Robespierre has his uses. Olivier Dalibard is a remarkable man. He is one of those children of the Revolution whom that great mother is bound to save."

"By betraying his brethren?" said B——, drily.

"I do not allow the inference. The simple fact is, that Dalibard has spent many years in England,—he has married an Englishwoman of birth and connections—he knows well the English language and the English people,—and just now when the First Consul is so anxious to *approfondir* the popular feelings of that strange nation, with whose government he is compelled to go to war, he may naturally have much to say to so acute an observer as Olivier Dalibard."

"Um!" said B——; "with such patronage, Robespierre's friend should hold his head somewhat higher!"

Meanwhile, Olivier Dalibard, crossing the gardens of the palace, took his way to the Faubourg St. Germain. There was no change in the aspect of this man; the same meditative tranquillity characterised his downward eyes and bended brow; the same precise simplicity of dress which had pleased the prim taste of Robespierre, gave decorum to his slender stooping form. No expression more cheerful, no footstep more elastic, bespoke the exile's return to his native land, or the sanguine expectations of Intellect restored to a career. Yet, to all appearance, the prospects of Dalibard were bright and promising. The First Consul was at that stage of his greatness, when he sought to employ in his service all such talent as the Revolution had made manifest—provided only, that it was not stained with notorious bloodshed, or too strongly associated with the Jacobin clubs. His quick eye seemed to have discovered already the abilities of Dalibard, and to have appreciated the sagacity and know-

ledge of men which had enabled this subtle person to obtain the friendship of Robespierre, without sharing in his crimes. He had been frequently closeted with Buonaparte; he was in the declared favour of Fouché, who, though not at that period at the head of the police, was too necessary amidst the dangers of the time, deepened as they were by the rumours of some terrible and profound conspiracy, to be laid aside, as the First Consul had at one moment designed. One man alone, of those high in the State, appeared to distrust Olivier Dalibard — the celebrated Cambacères. But with his aid the Provençal could dispense. What was the secret of Dalibard's power? was it, in truth, owing solely to his native talent, and his acquired experience, especially of England?— was it by honourable means that he had won the ear of the First Consul? We may be sure of the contrary; for it is a striking attribute of men once thoroughly tainted by the indulgence of vicious schemes and stratagems, that they become wholly blinded to those plain paths of ambition which common sense makes manifest to ordinary ability. If we regard narrowly the lives of great criminals, we are often very much startled by the extraordinary acuteness,—the profound calculation,—the patient meditative energy which they have employed upon the conception and execution of a crime. We feel inclined to think that such intellectual power would have commanded great distinction, worthily used and guided; but we never find that these great criminals seem to have been sensible of the opportunities to real eminence which they have thrown away. Often we observe that there have been before them vistas into worldly greatness which, by no uncommon prudence and exertion, would have conducted honest men half as clever to fame and power; but, with a strange obliquity of vision, they appear to have looked from these broad clear avenues into some dark, tangled defile, in which, by the subtlest ingenuity, and through the most besetting perils, they might attain at last to the success of a fraud or the enjoyment of a vice. In crime once indulged there is a wonderful fascination—and the fascination is, not rarely, great in proportion to the intellect of the criminal. There is always hope of reform for a dull, unedu-

cated, stolid man, led by accident or temptation into guilt; but where a man of great ability, and highly educated, besots himself in the intoxication of dark and terrible excitements, takes impure delight in tortuous and slimy ways, the good angel abandons him for ever.

Olivier Dalibard walked musingly on—gained a house in one of the most desolate quarters of the abandoned faubourg, mounted the spacious stairs, and rang at the door of an attic next the roof. After some moments, the door was slowly and cautiously opened, and two small fierce eyes, peering through a mass of black tangled curls, gleamed through the aperture. The gaze seemed satisfactory.

"Enter, friend," said the inmate, with a sort of complacent grunt; and, as Dalibard obeyed, the man reclosed, and barred the door.

The room was bare to beggary,—the ceiling, low and sloping was blackened with smoke. A wretched bed, two chairs, a table, a strong chest, a small cracked looking-glass, completed the inventory. The dress of the occupier was not in keeping with the chamber;—true that it was not such as was worn by the wealthier classes, but it betokened no sign of poverty. A blue coat, with high collar, and half of military fashion, was buttoned tight over a chest of vast girth; the nether garments were of leather, scrupulously clean, and solid, heavy riding-boots came half-way up the thigh. A more sturdy, stalwart, strong-built knave never excited the admiration which physical power always has a right to command; and Dalibard gazed on him with envy. The pale scholar absolutely sighed as he thought—what an auxiliary to his own scheming mind would have been so tough a frame!

But even less in form than face did the man of thews and sinews contrast the man of wile and craft. Opposite that high forehead, with its massive development of organs, scowled the low front of one to whom thought was unfamiliar—protuberant, indeed, over the shaggy brows, where phrenologists place the seats of practical perception—strongly marked in some of the brutes, as in the dog—but almost literally void of those higher organs, by which we reason, and imagine, and construct.

But in rich atonement for such deficiency, all the animal reigned triumphant in the immense mass and width of the skull behind. And as the hair, long before, curled in close rings to the nape of the bull-like neck, you saw before you one of those useful instruments to ambition and fraud, which recoil at no danger, comprehend no crime, are not without certain good qualities, under virtuous guidance,—for they have the fidelity, the obedience, the stubborn courage of the animal; but which, under evil control, turn those very qualities to unsparing evil—bull-dogs to rend the foe, as bull-dogs to defend the master.

For some moments the two men gazed silently at each other. At length Dalibard said, with an air of calm superiority—

"My friend, it is time that I should be presented to the chiefs of your party!"

"Chiefs, *par tous les diables!*" growled the other; "we Chouans are all chiefs, when it comes to blows. You have seen my credentials; you know that I am a man to be trusted what more do you need?"

"For myself nothing; but my friends are more scrupulous. I have sounded, as I promised, the heads of the old Jacobin party—and they are favourable. This upstart soldier, who has suddenly seized in his iron grasp all the fruits of the Revolution, is as hateful to them as to you. But, *que voulez-vous, mon cher?* men are men! It is one thing to destroy Buonaparte; it is another thing to restore the Bourbons. How can the Jacobin chiefs depend on your assurance, or my own, that the Bourbons will forget the old offences, and reward the new service? You apprise me, so do your credentials, that a prince of the blood is engaged in this enterprise, that he will appear at the proper season. Put me in direct communication with this representative of the Bourbons, and I promise in return, if his assurances are satisfactory, that you shall have an *émeute* to be felt from Paris to Marseilles. If you cannot do this, I am useless; and I withdraw——"

"Withdraw! *Garde à vous—Monsieur le Savant!* No man withdraws alive from a conspiracy like ours."

We have said before that Olivier Dalibard was not physically

brave; and the look of the Chouan, as those words were said, would have frozen the blood of many a bolder man. But the habitual hypocrisy of Dalibard enabled him to disguise his fear, and he replied, drily:—

"*Monsieur le Chouan*,—it is not by threats that you will gain adherents to a desperate cause, which, on the contrary, requires wild words and flattering inducements. If you commit a violence—a murder—*mon cher*—Paris is not Bretagne; we have a police; you will be discovered."

"Ha, ha! what then?—do you think I fear the guillotine?"

"For yourself—no; but for your leaders—yes! If you are discovered, and arrested for crime, do you fancy that the police will not recognise the right arm of the terrible George Cadoudal?—that they will not guess that Cadoudal is at Paris?—that Cadoudal will not accompany you to the guillotine?"

The Chouan's face fell. Olivier watched him and pursued his advantage.

"I asked you to introduce to me this shadow of a prince, under which you would march to a counter-revolution. But I will be more easily contented. Present me to George Cadoudal, the hero of Morbihan; he is a man in whom I can trust, and with whom I can deal. What!—you hesitate? How do you suppose enterprises of this nature can be carried on? If, from fear and distrust of each other, the man you would employ cannot meet the chief who directs him, there will be delay—confusion—panic,—and you will all perish by the executioner. And for me, Pierre Guillot, consider my position. I am in some favour with the First Consul—I have a station of respectability—a career lies before me. Can you think that I will hazard these, with my head to boot, like a rash child? Do you suppose that, in entering into this terrible contest, I would consent to treat only with subordinates? Do not deceive yourself. Again, I say, tell your employers that they must confer with me directly, or *je m'en lave les mains*."

"I will repeat what you say," answered Guillot, sullenly. "Is this all?"

"All for the present," said Dalibard, slowly drawing on his gloves, and retreating towards the door. The Chouan

watched him with a suspicious and sinister eye; and as the Provençal's hand was on the latch, he laid his own rough grasp on Dalibard's shoulder—

"I know not how it is, Monsieur Dalibard, but I mistrust you."

"Distrust is natural and prudent to all who conspire," replied the scholar, quietly. "I do not ask you to confide in me—your employers bade you seek me—I have mentioned my conditions—let them decide."

"You carry it off well, Monsieur Dalibard. And I am under a solemn oath, which poor George made me take, knowing me to be a hot-headed, honest fellow—*mauvaise tête*, if you will—that I will keep my hand off pistol and knife upon mere suspicion—that nothing less than his word, or than clear and positive proof of treachery, shall put me out of good humour and into warm blood. But bear this with you, Monsieur Dalibard, if I once discover that you use our secrets to betray them,—should George see you, and one hair of his head come to injury through *your* hands, I will wring your neck as a housewife wrings a pullet's."

"I don't doubt your strength or your ferocity, Pierre Guillot; but my neck will be safe; you have enough to do to take care of your own—*au revoir*."

With a tone and look of calm and fearless irony, the scholar thus spoke and left the room; but when he was on the stairs, he paused, and caught at the balustrade—the sickness as of terror at some danger past, or to be, came over him; and this contrast between the self-command, or simulation which belongs to moral courage, and the feebleness of natural and constitutional cowardice, would have been sublime if shown in a noble cause. In one so corrupt, it but betrayed a nature doubly formidable; for treachery and murder hatch their brood amidst the folds of a hypocrite's cowardice.

While thus the interview between Dalibard and the conspirator,—we must bestow a glance upon the Provençal's home.

In an apartment in one of the principal streets between the Boulevards and the Rue St. Honoré, a boy and a woman sat side by side, conversing in whispers. The boy was Gabriel

Varney, the woman Lucretia Dalibard. The apartment was furnished in the then modern taste which affected classical forms; and though not without a certain elegance, had something meagre and comfortless in its splendid tripods and thin-legged chairs. There was in the apartment that air which bespeaks the struggle for appearances—that struggle familiar with those of limited income, and vain aspirings; who want the taste which smoothes all inequalities, and gives a smile to home—that taste which affection seems to prompt, if not to create—which shows itself in a thousand nameless, costless trifles, each a grace. No sign was there of the household cares or industry of women. No flowers, no music, no embroidery-frame, no work-table. Lucretia had none of the sweet feminine habits which betray so lovelily the whereabout of women. All was formal and precise, like rooms which we enter and leave—not those in which we settle and dwell.

Lucretia herself is changed, her air is more assured, her complexion more pale, the evil character of her mouth more firm and pronounced.

Gabriel, still a mere boy in years, has a premature look of man. The down shades his lip. His dress, though showy and theatrical, is no longer that of boyhood. His rounded cheek has grown thin, as with the care and thought which beset the anxious step of youth on entering into life.

Both, as before remarked, spoke in whispers;—both from time to time glanced fearfully at the door; both felt that they belonged to a hearth round which smile not the jocund graces of trust and love, and the heart's open ease.

"But," said Gabriel—"but if you would be safe, my father must have no secrets hid from you."

"I do not know that he has. He speaks to me frankly of his hopes—of the share he has in the discovery of the plot against the First Consul—of his interviews with Pierre Guillot, the Breton."

"Ah, because *there* your courage supports him, and your acuteness assists his own. Such secrets belong to his public life—his political schemes—with those he will trust you. It is his private life—his private projects you must know."

"But what does he conceal from me? Apart from politics, his whole mind seems bent on the very natural object of securing the intimacy with his rich cousin, Monsieur Bellanger from whom he has a right to expect so large an inheritance."

"Bellanger is rich, but he is not much older than my father."

"He has bad health."

"No," said Gabriel, with a downcast eye and a strange smile—"he has not bad health, but he may not be long-lived."

"How do you mean?" asked Lucretia, sinking her voice into a still lower whisper, while a shudder, she scarce knew why, passed over her frame.

"What does my father do," resumed Gabriel, "in that room at the top of the house? Does he tell you *that* secret?"

"He makes experiments in chemistry. You know that that was always his favourite study. You smile again! Gabriel, do not smile so; it appals me. Do you think there is some mystery in that chamber?"

"It matters not what we think, *belle mère;* it matters much what we know. If I were you, I *would* know what is in that chamber. I repeat, to be safe, you must have all his secrets or none. Hush, that is his step!"

The door-handle turned noiselessly, and Olivier entered. His look fell on his son's face, which betrayed only apparent surprise at his unexpected return. He then glanced at Lucretia's, which was, as usual, cold and impenetrable.

"Gabriel," said Dalibard, gently, "I have come in for you. I have promised to take you to spend the day at Monsieur Bellanger's; you are a great favourite with Madame. Come, my boy. I shall be back soon, Lucretia. I shall but drop in to leave Gabriel at my cousin's."

Gabriel rose cheerfully, as if only alive to the expectation of the *bon-bons* and compliments he received habitually from Madame Bellanger.

"And you can take your drawing implements with you," continued Dalibard. "This good Monsieur Bellanger has given you permission to copy his Poussin."

"His Poussin! Ah, *that* is placed in his bedroom,[1] is it not?"

"Yes," answered Dalibard, briefly.

Gabriel lifted his sharp, bright eyes to his father's face. Dalibard turned away.

"Come!" he said, with some impatience; and the boy took up his hat.

In another minute Lucretia was alone.

Alone, in an English home, is a word implying no dreary solitude to an accomplished woman; but alone in that foreign land—alone in those half-furnished, desolate apartments—few books, no musical instruments, no companions during the day to drop in;—*that* loneliness was wearying. And that mind so morbidly active! In the old Scottish legend, the Spirit that serves the wizard must be kept constantly employed; suspend its work for a moment, and it rends the enchanter. It is so with minds that crave for excitement, and live without relief of heart and affection, on the hard tasks of the intellect.

Lucretia mused over Gabriel's words and warning: "To be safe, you must know all his secrets or none." What was the secret which Dalibard had not communicated to her?

She rose, stole up the cold, cheerless stairs, and ascended to the attic which Dalibard had lately hired. It was locked; and she observed that the lock was small—so small, that the key might be worn in a ring. She descended and entered her husband's usual cabinet, which adjoined the sitting-room. All the books which the house contained were there; a few works on metaphysics—Spinoza in especial—the great Italian histories, some volumes of statistics, many on physical and mechanical philosophy, and one or two works of biography and memoirs: No light literature, that grace and flower of human culture—that best philosophy of all, humanising us with gentle art, making us wise through the humours, elevated through the passions, tender in the affections of our kind! She took out one of the volumes that seemed less arid than the rest, for

[1] It is scarcely necessary to observe that bedchambers in Paris, when forming part of the suite of reception-rooms, are often decorated no less elaborately than the other apartments.

she was weary of her own thoughts, and began to read. To her surprise, the first passage she opened was singularly interesting, though the title was nothing more seductive than the *Life of a Physician of Padua in the Sixteenth Century.* It related to that singular epoch of terror in Italy, when some mysterious disease, varying in a thousand symptoms, baffled all remedy, and long defied all conjecture—a disease attacking chiefly the heads of families, father and husband—rarely women. In one city, seven hundred husbands perished, but not one wife! The disease was poison. The hero of the memoir was one of the earlier discoverers of the true cause of this household epidemic. He had been a chief authority in a commission of inquiry. Startling were the details given in the work; the anecdotes, the histories, the astonishing craft brought daily to bear on the victim, the wondrous perfidy of the subtle means, the variation of the certain murder—here swift as epilepsy—there slow and wasting as long decline:—the lecture was absorbing; and absorbed in the book Lucretia still was, when she heard Dalibard's voice behind; he was looking over her shoulder.

"A strange selection for so fair a student! *Enfant,* play not with such weapons."

"But is this all true?"

"True, though scarce a fragment of the truth. The physician was a sorry chemist, and a worse philosopher. He blundered in his analysis of the means; and, if I remember rightly, he whines like a priest at the motives; for see you not what was really the cause of this spreading pestilence? It was the Saturnalia of the Weak—a burst of mocking license against the Strong: it was more—it was the innate force of the individual waging war against the many."

"I do not understand you."

"No! In that age, husbands were, indeed, lords of the household: they married mere children for their lands; they neglected and betrayed them; they were inexorable if the wife committed the faults set before her for example. Suddenly the wife found herself armed against her tyrant. His life was in her hands. So the weak had no mercy on the strong! But

man, too, was then, even more than now, a lonely wrestler in a crowded arena. Brute force alone gave him distinction in courts; wealth alone brought him justice in the halls, or gave him safety in his home. Suddenly, the frail puny man saw that he could reach the mortal part of his giant foe. The noiseless sling was in his hand—it smote Goliath from afar. Suddenly, the poor man, ground to the dust, spat upon by contempt, saw through the crowd of richer kinsmen, who shunned and bade him rot—saw those whose death made him heir to lordship, and gold, and palaces, and power, and esteem! As a worm through a wardrobe, that man ate through velvet and ermine, and gnawed out the hearts that beat in his way. No! A great intellect can comprehend these criminals, and account for the crime. It is a mighty thing to feel in one's self that one is an army—more than an army! What thousands and millions of men, with trumpet and banner, and under the sanction of glory, strive to do—*destroy a foe*, that, with little more than an effort of the will—with a drop, a grain, for all his arsenal—one man can do!"

There was a horrible enthusiasm about this reasoning devil as he spoke thus; his crest rose, his breast expanded. That animation which a noble thought gives to generous hearts kindled in the face of the apologist for the darkest and basest of human crimes. Lucretia shuddered; but her gloomy imagination was spelled; there was an interest mingled with her terror.

"Hush! you appal me," she said, at last, timidly. "But, happily, this fearful art exists no more to tempt and destroy?"

"As a mere philosophical discovery, it might be amusing to a chemist to learn exactly what were the compounds of those ancient poisons," said Dalibard, not directly answering the implied question. "Portions of the art are indeed lost, unless, as I suspect, there is much credulous exaggeration in the accounts transmitted to us. To kill by a flower, a pair of gloves, a soap-ball—kill by means which elude all possible suspicion—is it credible? What say you? An amusing research, indeed, if one had leisure! But enough of this now; it grows late. We dine with Monsieur de ——.

He wishes to let his hotel. Why, Lucretia, if we knew a little of this old art, *par Dieu!* we could soon hire the hotel! Well, well, perhaps we may survive my cousin Jean Bellanger!"

Three days afterwards, Lucretia stood by her husband's side in the secret chamber. From the hour when she left it, a change was perceptible in her countenance, which gradually removed from it the character of youth. Paler the cheek could scarce become, nor more cold the discontented, restless eye. But it was as if some great care had settled on her brow, and contracted yet more the stern outline of the lips. Gabriel noted the alteration; but he did not attempt to win her confidence. He was occupied rather in considering, first, if it were well for him to sound deeper into the mystery he suspected; and, secondly, to what extent, and on what terms, it became his interest to aid the designs in which, by Dalibard's hints and kindly treatment, he foresaw that he was meant to participate.

A word now on the rich kinsman of the Dalibards: Jean Bellanger had been one of those prudent republicans who had put the Revolution to profit. By birth a Marseillais,—he had settled in Paris, as an *épicier*, about the year 1785, and had distinguished himself by the adaptability and *finesse* which become those who fish in such troubled waters. He had sided with Mirabeau, next with Vergniaud, and the Girondins. These he forsook in time for Danton, whose facile corruptibility made him a seductive patron. He was a large purchaser in the sale of the emigrant property; he obtained a contract for the supply of the army in the Netherlands; he abandoned Danton as he had abandoned the Girondins, but without taking any active part in the after-proceedings of the Jacobins. His next connection was with Tallien and Barras, and he enriched himself yet more under the Directory than he had done in the earlier stages of the Revolution. Under cover of an appearance of *bonhomie* and good humour, a frank laugh and open countenance, Jean Bellanger had always retained general popularity and good-will; and was one of those whom the policy of the First Consul led him to conciliate. He had long since retired from the more vulgar departments of trade;

but continued to flourish as an army contractor. He had a large hotel and a splendid establishment. He was one of the great capitalists of Paris. The relationship between Dalibard and Bellanger was not very close, it was that of cousins twice removed; and during Dalibard's previous residence at Paris, each embracing different parties, and each eager in his career, the blood-tie between them had not been much thought of, though they were good friends, and each respected the other for the discretion with which he had kept aloof from the more sanguinary excesses of the time. As Bellanger was not many years older than Dalibard, as the former had but just married in the year 1791, and had naturally before him the prospect of a family—as his fortunes at that time, though rising, were unconfirmed, and as some nearer relations stood between them, in the shape of two promising sturdy nephews, Dalibard had not then calculated on any inheritance from his cousin. On his return circumstances were widely altered—Bellanger had been married some years, and no issue had blessed his nuptials. His nephews, draughted into the conscription, had perished in Egypt. Dalibard apparently became his nearest relative.

To avarice or to worldly ambition there was undoubtedly something very dazzling in the prospect thus opened to the eyes of Olivier Dalibard. The contractor's splendid mode of living, vying with that of the *fermier-général* of old, the colossal masses of capital, by which he backed and supported speculations, that varied with an ingenuity rendered practical and profound by experience, inflamed into fever the morbid restlessness of fancy and intellect which characterised the evil scholar. For that restlessness seemed to supply to his nature vices not constitutional to it. Dalibard had not the avarice that belongs either to a miser or a spendthrift. In his youth, his books and the simple desires of an abstract student sufficed to his wants, and a habit of method and order, a mechanical calculation which accompanied all his acts, from the least to the greatest—preserved him, even when most poor, from neediness and want. Nor was he by nature vain and ostentatious—those infirmities accompany a larger and more luxurious nature. His philosophy

rather despised, than inclined to, show. Yet since to plot and to scheme made his sole amusement, his absorbing excitement, —so a man wrapped in himself, and with no generous ends in view, has little to plot or to scheme for, but objects of worldly aggrandisement. In this, Dalibard resembled one whom the intoxication of gambling has mastered, who neither wants nor greatly prizes the stake, but who has grown wedded to the venture for it. It was a madness like that of a certain rich nobleman in our own country, who, with more money than he could spend, and with a skill in all games where skill enters that would have secured him success of itself,—having learned the art of cheating could not resist its indulgence. No hazard, no warning, could restrain him—cheat he must—the propensity became iron-strong as a Greek destiny.

That the possible chance of an inheritance so magnificent should dazzle Lucretia and Gabriel was yet more natural; for in them, it appealed to more direct and eloquent though not more powerful, propensities. Gabriel had every vice which the greed of gain most irritates and excites. Intense covetousness lay at the core of his heart; he had the sensual temperament which yearns for every enjoyment, and takes pleasure in every pomp and show of life. Lucretia with a hardness of mind that disdained luxury, and a certain grandeur (if such a word may be applied to one so perverted) that was incompatible with the sordid infirmities of the miser, had a determined and insatiable ambition to which gold was a necessary instrument. Wedded to one she loved, like Mainwaring, the ambition, as we have said in a former chapter, could have lived in another, and become devoted to intellectual efforts, in the nobler desire for power based on fame and genius. But now she had the gloomy cravings of one fallen, and the uneasy desire to restore herself to a lost position—she fed as an aliment upon scorn to bitterness, of all beings and all things around her. She was gnawed by that false fever which riots in those who seek by outward seemings and distinctions to console themselves for the want of their own self-esteem; or who, despising the world with which they are brought in contact, sigh for those worldly advantages which alone justify to the world itself their contempt.

To these diseased infirmities of vanity or pride, whether exhibited in Gabriel or Lucretia, Dalibard administered without apparent effort, not only by his conversation, but his habits of life. He mixed with those much wealthier than himself, but not better born—those who, in the hot and fierce ferment of that new society, were rising fast into new aristocracy,—the fortunate soldiers, daring speculators, plunderers of many an argosy that had been wrecked in the Great Storm. Every one about them was actuated by the keen desire "to make a fortune"—the desire was contagious. They were not absolutely poor in the proper sense of the word poverty, with Dalibard's annuity and the interest of Lucretia's fortune, but they were poor compared to those with whom they associated—poor enough for discontent. Thus, the image of the mighty wealth from which, perhaps, but a single life divided them, became horribly haunting. To Gabriel's sensual vision the image presented itself in the shape of unlimited pleasure and prodigal riot; to Lucretia, it wore the solemn majesty of power: to Dalibard himself, it was but the Eureka of a calculation—the palpable reward of wile, and scheme, and dexterous combinations. The devil had temptations suited to each. Meanwhile, the Dalibards were more and more with the Bellangers. Olivier glided in to talk of the chances and changes of the state and the market. Lucretia sat for hours, listening mutely to the contractor's boasts of past frauds, or submitting to the martyrdom of his victorious games at tric-trac. Gabriel, a spoiled darling, copied the pictures on the walls, complimented Madame, flattered Monsieur, and fawned on both for trinkets and crowns. Like three birds of night and omen, these three evil natures settled on the rich man's roof.

Was the rich man himself blind to the motives which budded forth into such attentive affection? His penetration was too acute—his ill opinion of mankind too strong, perhaps, for such amiable self-delusions. But he took all in good part; availed himself of Dalibard's hints and suggestions as to the employment of his capital; was polite to Lucretia, and readily condemned her to be beaten at tric-trac, while he accepted with *bonhomie* Gabriel's spirited copies of his pictures. But at times,

there was a gleam of satire and malice in his round grey eyes, and an inward chuckle at the caresses and flatteries he received, which perplexed Dalibard and humbled Lucretia. Had his wealth been wholly at his own disposal, these signs would have been inauspicious, but the new law was strict, and the bulk of Bellanger's property could not be alienated from his nearest kin. Was not Dalibard the nearest?

These hopes and speculations did not, as we have seen, absorb the restless and rank energies of Dalibard's crooked, but capacious and grasping intellect. Patiently and ingeniously he pursued his main political object—the detection of that audacious and complicated conspiracy against the First Consul, which ended in the tragic deaths of Pichegru, the Duc d'Enghien, and the erring but illustrious hero of La Vendée, George Cadoudal. In the midst of these dark plots for personal aggrandisement and political fortune, we leave, for the moment, the sombre, sullen soul of Olivier Dalibard.

* * * * *

Time has passed on, and Spring is over the world; the seeds, buried in the earth, burst to flower; but man's breast knoweth not the sweet division of the seasons. In winter or summer, autumn or spring alike, his thoughts sow the germs of his actions, and day after day his destiny gathers in her harvests.

The joy-bells ring clear through the groves of Laughton—an heir is born to the old name and fair lands of St. John! And, as usual, the present race welcomes merrily in that which shall succeed and replace it—that which shall thrust the enjoyers down into the black graves, and wrest from them the pleasant goods of the world. The joy-bell of birth is a note of warning to the knell for the dead; it wakes the worms beneath the mould: the new-born, every year that it grows and flourishes, speeds the parent to their feast. Yet who can predict that the infant shall become the heir?—who can tell that Death sits not side by side with the nurse at the cradle? Can the mother's hand measure out the woof of the Parcæ, or the father's eye detect through the darkness of the morrow the gleam of the fatal shears?

It is market-day, at a town in the midland districts of England

There Trade takes its healthiest and most animated form. You see not the stunted form and hollow eye of the mechanic —poor slave of the capitalist—poor agent and victim of the arch disequaliser—Civilisation. There strides the burly form of the farmer; there waits the ruddy hind with his flock; there, patient, sits the miller with his samples of corn; there, in the booths, gleam the humble wares which form the luxuries of cottage and farm. The thronging of men, and the clacking of whips, and the dull sound of waggon or dray, that parts the crowd as it passes, and the lowing of herds and the bleating of sheep, all are sounds of movement and bustle, yet blend with the pastoral associations of the primitive commerce, when the link between market and farm was visible and direct.

Towards one large house in the centre of the brisk life ebbing on, you might see stream after stream pour its way. The large doors swinging light on their hinges, the gilt letters that shine above the threshold, the windows, with their shutters outside cased in iron and studded with nails, announce that that house is the Bank of the town. Come in with that yeoman whose broad face tells its tale, sheepish and down-eyed—he has come not to invest but to borrow. What matters? war is breaking out anew, to bring the time of high prices, and paper money and credit. Honest yeoman, you will not be refused. He scratches his rough head, pulls a leg, as he calls it, when the clerk leans over the counter and asks to see "Muster Mawnering hisself." The clerk points to the little office-room of the new junior-partner, who has brought ten thousand pounds and a clear head to the firm. And the yeoman's great boots creak heavily in. I told you so, honest yeoman; you come out with a smile on your brown face, and your hand, that might fell an ox, buttons up your huge breeches pocket. You will ride home with a light heart —go and dine, and be merry.

The yeoman tramps to the ordinary; plates clatter, tongues wag, and the borrower's full heart finds vent in a good word for that kind "Muster Mawnering." For a wonder all join in the praise. "He's an honour to the town; he's a pride to the country—thof he's such a friend at a pinch, he's a rale mon

of business! He'll make the baunk worth a million!—and how well he spoke at the great county meeting about the war, and the laund, and them bloodthirsty Mounseers! If their members were loike him, Muster Fox would look small!"

The day declines; the town empties—whiskies, horses, and carts, are giving life to the roads and the lanes—and the market is deserted, and the bank is shut up, and William Mainwaring walks back to his home at the skirts of the town—not villa nor cottage—that plain English house with its cheerful face of red brick, and its solid squareness of shape—a symbol of substance in the fortunes of the owner! Yet, as he passes, he sees through the distant trees the hall of the member for the town. He pauses a moment, and sighs unquietly. That pause and that sigh betray the germ of ambition and discontent. Why should not he, who can speak so well, be member for the town, instead of that stammering squire? But his reason has soon silenced the querulous murmur. He hastens his step—he is at home! And there, in the neat-furnished drawing-room, which looks on the garden behind, hisses the welcoming tea-urn; and the piano is open, and there is a packet of new books on the table: and, best of all, there is the glad face of the sweet English wife. The happy scene was characteristic of the time, just when the simpler and more innocent luxuries of the higher class spread, not to spoil, but refine the middle. The dress, air, mien, movements of the young couple; the unassuming, suppressed, sober elegance of the house; the flower-garden, the books, and the music, evidences of cultivated taste, not signals of display, all bespoke the gentle fusion of ranks, before rude and uneducated wealth made in looms and lucky hits, rushed in to separate for ever the gentleman from the *parvenu*.

Spring smiles over Paris, over the spires of Notre Dame, and the crowded alleys of the Tuileries, over thousands and thousands eager, joyous, aspiring, reckless—the New Race of France—bound to one man's destiny, children of glory and of carnage, whose blood, the wolf and the vulture scent, hungry from afar!

The conspiracy against the life of the First Consul has been

detected and defeated. Pichegru is in prison, George Cadoudal awaits his trial, the Duc d'Enghien sleeps in his bloody grave; the imperial crown is prepared for the great soldier, and the great soldier's creatures bask in the noonday sun. Olivier Dalibard is in high and lucrative employment: his rise is ascribed to his talents—his opinions. No service connected with the detection of the conspiracy is traced or traceable by the public eye. If such exist, it is known but to those who have no desire to reveal it. The old apartments are retained; but they are no longer dreary, and comfortless, and deserted. They are gay with draperies and ormolu, and mirrors; and Madame Dalibard has her nights of reception, and Monsieur Dalibard has already his troops of clients. In that gigantic concentration of egotism, which, under Napoleon, is called The State, Dalibard has found his place. He has served to swell the power of the unit, and the cipher gains importance by its position in the sum.

Jean Bellanger is no more. He died, not suddenly, and yet of some quick disease—nervous exhaustion: his schemes, they said, had worn him out. But the state of Dalibard, though prosperous, is not that of the heir to the dead millionaire. What mistake is this? The bulk of that wealth must go to the nearest kin—so runs the law. But the will is read; and, for the first time, Olivier Dalibard learns that the dead man had a son—a son by a former marriage—the marriage undeclared, unknown, amidst the riot of the Revolution; for the wife was the daughter of a *proscrit*. The son had been reared at a distance, put to school at Lyons, and unavowed to the second wife, who had brought an ample dower, and whom that discovery might have deterred from the altar. Unacknowledged through life—in death, at least, the son's rights are proclaimed: and Olivier Dalibard feels that Jean Bellanger has died in vain! For days has the pale Provençal been closeted with lawyers; but there is no hope in litigation. The proofs of the marriage, the birth, the identity, come out clear and clearer; and the beardless schoolboy at Lyons reaps all the profit of those nameless schemes and that mysterious death. Olivier Dalibard desires the friendship—the intimacy of the heir. But the heir

is consigned to the guardianship of a merchant at Lyons, near of kin to his mother—and the guardian responds but coldly to Olivier's letters. Suddenly the defeated aspirant seems reconciled to his loss. The widow Bellanger has her own separate fortune; and it is large beyond expectation. In addition to the wealth she brought the deceased, his affection had led him to invest vast sums in her name. The widow then is rich—rich as the heir himself. She is still fair. Poor woman, she needs consolation! But, meanwhile, the nights of Olivier Dalibard are disturbed and broken. His eye, in the daytime, is haggard and anxious; he is seldom seen on foot in the streets. Fear is his companion by day, and sits at night on his pillow. The Chouan, Pierre Guillot, who looked to George Cadoudal as a god, knows that George Cadoudal has been betrayed, and suspects Olivier Dalibard; and the Chouan has an arm of iron, and a heart steeled against all mercy. Oh, how the pale scholar thirsted for that Chouan's blood! With what relentless pertinacity, with what ingenious research he had set all the hounds of the police upon the track of that single man! How notably he had failed! An avenger lived; and Olivier Dalibard started at his own shadow on the wall. But he did not the less continue to plot and to intrigue—nay, such occupation became more necessary, as an escape from himself.

And, in the meanwhile, Olivier Dalibard sought to take courage from the recollection that the Chouan had taken an oath (and he knew that oaths are held sacred with the Bretons) that he would keep his hand from his knife unless he had clear evidence of treachery;—such evidence existed, but only in Dalibard's desk, or the archives of Fouché. Tush, he was safe! And so, when from dreams of fear, he started at the depth of night, so his bolder wife would whisper to him with firm, uncaressing lips,—"Olivier Dalibard, thou fearest the living, dost thou never fear the dead? Thy dreams are haunted with a spectre. Why takes it not the accusing shape of thy mouldering kinsman?" Dalibard would have answered, for he was a philosopher in his cowardice, "*Il n'y a que les morts qui ne reviennent pas.*"

It is the notable convenience of us narrators to represent, by what is called *soliloquy*, the thoughts—the interior of the personages we describe. And this is almost the master-work of the tale-teller—that is, if the soliloquy be really in words, what self-commune is in the dim and tangled recesses of the human heart! But to this privilege we are rarely admitted in the case of Olivier Dalibard; for he rarely communed with himself; a sort of mental calculation, it is true, eternally went on within him, like the wheels of a destiny; but it had become a mechanical operation—seldom disturbed by that *consciousness of thought*, with its struggles of fear and doubt, conscience and crime, which gives its appalling interest to the soliloquy of tragedy. Amidst the tremendous secrecy of that profound intellect, as at the bottom of a sea, only monstrous images of terror, things of prey, stirred in cold-blooded and devouring life; but into these deeps Olivier himself did not dive. He did not face his own soul; his outer life and his inner life seemed separate individualities, just as, in some complicated state, the social machine goes on through all its numberless cycles of vice and dread, whatever the acts of the government, which is the representative of the state, and stands for the state in the shallow judgment of history.

Before this time Olivier Dalibard's manner to his son had greatly changed from the indifference it betrayed in England; it was kind and affectionate, almost caressing; while, on the other hand, Gabriel, as if in possession of some secret which gave him power over his father, took a more careless and independent tone, often absented himself from the house for days together, joined the revels of young profligates older than himself, with whom he had formed acquaintance, indulged in spendthrift expenses, and plunged prematurely into the stream of vicious pleasure that oozed through the mud of Paris.

One morning, Dalibard, returning from a visit to Madame Bellanger, found Gabriel alone in the *salon*, contemplating his fair face and gay dress in one of the mirrors, and smoothing down the hair, which he wore long and sleek, as in the portraits of Raffaelle. Dalibard's lip curled at the boy's coxcombry, though such tastes he himself had fostered, according to his

ruling principles, that to govern, you must find a foible, or instil it; but the sneer changed into a smile.

"Are you satisfied with yourself, *joli garçon?*" he said, with saturnine playfulness.

"At least, sir, I hope that you will not be ashamed of me, when you formally legitimatise me as your son. The time has come, you know, to keep your promise."

"And it shall be kept, do not fear. But first I have an employment for you—a mission—your first embassy, Gabriel."

"I listen, sir."

"I have to send to England a communication of the utmost importance — public importance — to the secret agent of the French government. We are on the eve of a descent on England. We are in correspondence with some in London on whom we count for support. A man might be suspected, and searched—mind, *searched.* You, a boy, with English name and speech, will be my safest envoy. Buonaparte approves my selection. On your return, he permits me to present you to him. He loves the rising generation. In a few days you will be prepared to start."

Despite the calm tone of the father, so had the son, from the instinct of fear and self-preservation, studied every accent, every glance of Olivier—so had he constituted himself a spy upon the heart whose perfidy was ever armed, that he detected at once in the proposal some scheme hostile to his interests. He made, however, no opposition to the plan suggested; and, seemingly satisfied with his obedience, the father dismissed him.

As soon as he was in the streets, Gabriel went straight to the house of Madame Bellanger. The hotel had been purchased in her name, and she therefore retained it. Since her husband's death, he had avoided that house, before so familiar to him; and now he grew pale and breathed hard as he passed by the porter's lodge up the lofty stairs.

He knew of his father's recent and constant visits at the house; and, without conjecturing precisely what were Olivier's designs, he connected them, in the natural and acquired shrewdness he possessed, with the wealthy widow. He resolved to watch, observe, and draw his own conclusions. As he

entered Madame Bellanger's room rather abruptly, he observed her push aside amongst her papers something she had been gazing on—something which sparkled to his eyes. He sat himself down close to her with the caressing manner he usually adopted towards women; and in the midst of the babbling talk with which ladies generally honour boys, he suddenly, as if by accident, displaced the papers, and saw his father's miniature set in brilliants. The start of the widow, her blush, and her exclamation, strengthened the light that flashed upon his mind. "Oh, ho! I see now," he said, laughing, "why my father is always praising black hair; and—nay, nay — gentlemen may admire ladies in Paris, surely?"

"Pooh, my dear child, your father is an old friend of my poor husband's, and a near relation, too! But, Gabriel, *mon petit ange!* you had better not say at home that you have seen this picture, Madame Dalibard might be foolish enough to be angry."

"To be sure not. I have kept a secret before now!"—and again the boy's cheek grew pale, and he looked hurriedly round.

"And you are very fond of Madame Dalibard, too; so you must not vex her."

"Who says I'm fond of Madame Dalibard?—a stepmother!"

"Why, your father, of course—*il est si bon—ce pauvre Dalibard;* and all men like cheerful faces; but, then, poor lady—an Englishwoman so strange here,—very natural she should fret, and with bad health, too."

"Bad health! ah, I remember!—*she*, also, does not seem likely to live long!"

"So your poor father apprehends. Well, well; how uncertain life is! Who would have thought dear Bellanger would have——"

Gabriel rose hastily, and interrupted the widow's pathetic reflections. "I only ran in to say *Bon jour.* I must leave you now."

"Adieu, my dear boy—not a word on the miniature! By the by, here's a shirt-pin for you — *tu es joli comme un amour.*"

All was now clear to Gabriel; it was necessary to get rid of him, and for ever. Dalibard might dread his attachment to Lucretia—he would dread still more his closer intimacy with the widow of Bellanger, should that widow wed again—and Dalibard, freed like her (by what means?), be her choice! Into that abyss of wickedness, fathomless to the innocent, the young villanous eye plunged, and surveyed the ground; a terror seized on him—a terror of life and death. Would Dalibard spare even his own son, if that son had the power to injure? This mission—was it exile only?—only a fall back to the old squalor of his uncle's studio?—only the laying aside of a useless tool?—or was it a snare to the grave? Demon as Dalibard was, doubtless the boy wronged him. But guilt construes guilt for the worst.

Gabriel had formerly enjoyed the thought to match himself, should danger come, with Dalibard; the hour *had* come, and he felt his impotence. Brave his father, and refuse to leave France! from that, even his reckless hardihood shrank, as from inevitable destruction. But to depart—be the poor victim and dupe; after having been let loose amongst the riot of pleasure,—to return to labour and privation—from that option his vanity and his senses vindictively revolted. And Lucretia!—the only being who seemed to have a human kindness to him!—through all the vicious egotism of his nature, he had some grateful sentiments for her: and even the egotism assisted that unwonted amiability, for he felt that, Lucretia gone, he had no hold on his father's house—that the home of her successor never would be his. While thus brooding, he lifted his eyes, and saw Dalibard pass in his carriage towards the Tuileries. The house, then, was clear—he could see Lucretia alone. He formed his resolution at once, and turned homewards. As he did so, he observed a man at the angle of the street, whose eyes followed Dalibard's carriage with an expression of unmistakable hate and revenge; but scarcely had he marked the countenance, before the man, looking hurriedly round, darted away, and was lost amongst the crowd.

Now that countenance was not quite unfamiliar to Gabriel.

He had seen it before, as he saw it now—hastily, and, as it were, by fearful snatches. Once he had marked, on returning home at twilight, a figure lurking by the house—and something, in the quickness with which it turned from his gaze, joined to his knowledge of Dalibard's apprehensions, made him mention the circumstance to his father when he entered. Dalibard bade him hasten with a note, written hurriedly, to an agent of the police, whom he kept lodged near at hand. The man was still on the threshold when the boy went out on this errand, and he caught a glimpse of his face; but before the police-agent reached the spot, the ill-omened apparition had vanished. Gabriel now, as his eye rested full upon that threatening brow and those burning eyes, was convinced that he saw before him the terrible Pierre Guillot, whose very name blenched his father's cheek. When the figure retreated, he resolved at once to pursue. He hurried through the crowd amidst which the man had disappeared, and looked eagerly into the faces of those he jostled; sometimes, at the distance he caught sight of a figure which appeared to resemble the one which he pursued, but the likeness faded on approach. The chase, however, vague and desultory as it was, led him on till his way was lost amongst labyrinths of narrow and unfamiliar streets. Heated and thirsty, he paused, at last, before a small *café*, entered to ask for a draught of lemonade, and behold, chance had favoured him!—the man he sought was seated there before a bottle of wine, and intently reading the newspaper. Gabriel sat himself down at the adjoining table. In a few moments the man was joined by a new comer; the two conversed, but in whispers so low, that Gabriel was unable to hear their conversation—though he caught more than once the name of "George." Both the men were violently excited, and the expression of their countenances was menacing and sinister. The first comer pointed often to the newspaper, and read passages from it to his companion. This suggested to Gabriel the demand for another journal. When the waiter brought it to him, his eye rested upon a long paragraph in which the name of George Cadoudal frequently occurred. In

fact, all the journals of the day were filled with speculations on the conspiracy and trial of that fiery martyr to an erring adaptation of a noble principle. Gabriel knew that his father had had a principal share in the detection of the defeated enterprise; and his previous persuasions were confirmed.

His sense of hearing grew sharper by continued effort, and at length he heard the first comer say distinctly.—"If I were but sure that I had brought this fate upon George, by introducing to him that accursed Dalibard—if my oath did but justify me, I would——" the concluding sentence was lost. A few moments after, the two men rose, and from the familiar words that passed between them and the master of the *café*, who approached, himself, to receive the reckoning, the shrewd boy perceived that the place was no unaccustomed haunt. He crept nearer and nearer; and as the landlord shook hands with his customer, he heard distinctly the former address him by the name of "Guillot." When the men withdrew, Gabriel followed them at a distance (taking care first to impress on his memory the name of the *café*, and the street in which it was placed,) and, as he thought, unobserved: he was mistaken. Suddenly, in one street, more solitary than the rest, the man whom he was mainly bent on tracking, turned round—advanced to Gabriel, who was on the other side of the street, and laid his hand upon him so abruptly, that the boy was fairly taken by surprise.

"Who bade you follow us?" said he, with so dark and fell an expression of countenance, that even Gabriel's courage failed him: "no evasion—no lies—speak out, and at once;" and the grasp tightened on the boy's throat.

Gabriel's readiness of resource and presence of mind did not long forsake him.

"Loose your hold, and I will tell you—you stifle me." The man slightly relaxed his grasp, and Gabriel said, quickly —"My mother perished on the guillotine in the Reign of Terror; I am for the Bourbons. I thought I overheard words which showed sympathy for poor George, the brave Chouan. I followed you; for I thought I was following friends."

The man smiled as he fixed his steady eye upon the

unflinching child: "My poor lad," he said, gently, "I believe you—pardon me—but follow us no more—we are dangerous!" He waved his hand, and strode away, and rejoined his companion, and Gabriel reluctantly abandoned the pursuit and went homeward. It was long before he reached his father's house, for he had strayed into a strange quarter of Paris, and had frequently to inquire the way. At length he reached home, and ascended the stairs to a small room, in which Lucretia usually sat, and which was divided by a narrow corridor from the sleeping-chamber of herself and Dalibard. His stepmother, leaning her cheek upon her hand, was seated by the window, so absorbed in some gloomy thoughts, which cast over her rigid face a shade, intense and solemn as despair, that she did not perceive the approach of the boy till he threw his arms round her neck, and then she started as in alarm—

"You! only *you*," she said, with a constrained smile; "see, my nerves are not so strong as they were!"

"You are disturbed, *belle mère*—has *he* been vexing you?"

"He—Dalibard—no, indeed, we were only, this morning, discussing matters of business."

"Business!—that means money."

"Truly," said Lucretia, "money does make the staple of life's business. In spite of his new appointment, your father needs some sums in hand—favours are to be bought—opportunities for speculation occur, and——"

"And my father," interrupted Gabriel, "wishes your consent to raise the rest of your portion."

Lucretia looked surprised, but answered quietly: "He had my consent long since, but the trustees to the marriage-settlement—mere men of business—my uncle's bankers, for I had lost all claim on my kindred—refuse, or at least, interpose such difficulties as amount to refusal."

"But that reply came some days since," said Gabriel, musingly.

"How did you know—did your father tell you?"

"Poor *belle mère!*" said Gabriel, almost with pity, "can you live in this house, and not watch all that passes—every stranger,

every message, every letter? But what, then, does he wish with you?"

"He has suggested my returning to England, and seeing the trustees myself. His interest can obtain my passport."

"And you have refused?"

"I have not consented."

"Consent!—hush!—your maid—Marie is not waiting without," and Gabriel rose and looked forth; "no, confound these doors! none close as they ought in this house. Is it not a clause in your settlement that the half of your fortune now invested goes to the survivor?"

"It is," replied Lucretia, struck and thrilled at the question. "How, again, did you know this?"

"I saw my father reading the copy. If you die first, then, he has all. If he merely wanted the money, he would not send you away!"

There was a terrible pause. Gabriel resumed: "I trust you, it may be, with my life; but I will speak out. My father goes much to Bellanger's widow—she is rich and weak. Come to England! Yes, *come*—for he is about to dismiss *me*. He fears that I shall be in the way, to warn you, perhaps, or to—to in short, *both* of us are in his way. He gives you an escape. Once in England, the war which is breaking out will prevent your return. He will twist the laws of divorce to his favour—he will marry again! What then?—he spares you what remains of your fortune—he spares your life. Remain here—cross his schemes—and no, no;—come to England—safer anywhere than here!"

As he spoke, great changes had passed over Lucretia's countenance. At first it was the flash of conviction, then the stunned shock of horror; now she rose—rose to her full height—and there was a livid and deadly light in her eyes—the light of conscious courage, and power, and revenge. "Fool," she muttered, "with all his craft! Fool, fool! As if, in the war of household perfidy, the woman did not always conquer! Man's only chance is to be mailed in honour!"

"But," said Gabriel, overhearing her, "but you do not remember what it is. There is nothing you can see, and guard against. It is not like an enemy face to face; it is death in the food, in the air, in

the touch. You stretch out your arms in the dark—you feel nothing, and you die! Oh, do not fancy that I have not thought well (for I am almost a man now) if there were no means to resist—there are none! As well make head against the plague—it is in the atmosphere. Come to England, and return. Live poorly, if you must—but live—but *live!*"

"Return to England poor and despised, and bound still to him, or a disgraced and divorced wife—disgraced by the low-born dependant on my kinsman's house—and fawn perhaps upon my sister and her husband for bread! Never!—I am at my post, and I will not fly!"

"Brave! brave!" said the boy, clapping his hands, and sincerely moved by a daring superior to his own—"I wish I could help you!"

Lucretia's eye rested on him with the full gaze, so rare in its looks. She drew him to her, and kissed his brow—"Boy, through life, whatever our guilt and its doom, we are bound to each other. I may yet live to have wealth—if so, it is yours as a son's. I may be iron to others—never to you. Enough of this—I must reflect!" She passed her hands over her eyes a moment, and resumed—"You would help me in my self-defence; I think you can. You have been more alert in your watch than I have. You must have means I have not secured. Your father guards well all his papers!"

"I have keys to every desk. My foot passed the threshold of that room under the roof before yours. But, no; his powers can never be yours! He has never confided to you half his secrets! He has antidotes for every—every——"

"Hist! what noise is that? Only the shower on the casements! No, no, child, that is not my object. Cadoudal's conspiracy! Your father has letters from Fouché which show how he has betrayed others who are stronger to avenge than a woman and a boy."

"Well!"

"I would have those letters! Give me the keys! But hold—Gabriel—Gabriel, you may yet misjudge him. This woman—wife to the dead man—*his* wife! Horror! Have you no proofs of what you imply?"

"Proofs!" echoed Gabriel, in a tone of wonder, "I can but see and conjecture. You are warned, watch and decide for yourself. But again I say, come to England; *I* shall go!"

Without reply, Lucretia took the keys from Gabriel's half-reluctant hand, and passed into her husband's writing-room. When she had entered, she locked the door. She passed at once to a huge secretary, of which the key was small as a fairy's work. She opened it with ease by one of the counterfeits. No love-correspondence—the first object of her search, for she was woman—met her eye. What need of letters, when interviews were so facile? But she soon found a document that told all which love-letters could tell—it was an account of the moneys and possessions of Madame Bellanger—and there were pencil notes on the margin:—"Vautran will give 400,000 francs for the lands in Auvergne—to be accepted. Consult on the power of sale granted to a second husband. Query, if there is no chance of the heir-at-law disputing the moneys invested in Madame's B.'s name,"—and such memoranda as a man notes down in the schedule of properties about to be his own. In these inscriptions there was a hideous mockery of all love—like the blue lights of corruption, they showed the black vault of the heart. The pale reader saw what her own attractions had been, and, fallen as she was, she smiled superior in her bitterness of scorn. Arranged methodically with the precision of business, she found the letters she next looked for; one recognising Dalibard's services in the detection of the conspiracy, and authorising him to employ the police in the search of Pierre Guillot, sufficed for her purpose. She withdrew, and secreted it. She was about to lock up the secretary, when her eye fell on the title of a small MS. volume in a corner; and as she read, she pressed one hand convulsively to her heart, while, twice with the other, she grasped the volume, and twice withdrew the grasp. The title ran harmlessly thus:—"*Philosophical and Chemical Inquiries into the Nature and Materials of the Poisons in Use between the* 14*th and* 16*th Centuries.*" Hurriedly, and at last, as if doubtful of herself, she left the MS., closed the secretary, and returned to Gabriel.

"You have got the paper you seek?" he said.

"Yes."

"Then whatever you do, you must be quick—he will soon discover the loss."

"I will be quick."

"It is I whom he will suspect," said Gabriel, in alarm, as that thought struck him. "No, for my sake, do not take the letter till I am gone. Do not fear, in the meantime, he will do nothing against you while I am here."

"I will replace the letter till then," said Lucretia, meekly. "You have a right to my first thoughts." So she went back and Gabriel (suspicious perhaps) crept after her.

As she replaced the document, he pointed to the MS. which had tempted her.—"I have seen that before, how I longed for it! If anything ever happens to him, I claim *that* as my legacy."

Their hands met as he said this, and grasped each other convulsively; Lucretia relocked the secretary, and when she gained the next room, she tottered to a chair. Her strong nerves gave way for the moment; she uttered no cry, but, by the whiteness of her face, Gabriel saw that she was senseless: senseless for a minute or so—scarcely more. But the return to consciousness with a clenched hand, and a brow of defiance, and a stare of mingled desperation and dismay, seemed rather the awaking from some frightful dream of violence and struggle than the slow, languid recovery from the faintness of a swoon. Yes, henceforth, to sleep, was to couch by a serpent—to breathe was to listen for the avalanche! Thou who didst trifle so wantonly with Treason, now gravely front the grim comrade thou hast won; thou scheming desecrator of the Household Gods, now learn, to the last page of dark knowledge, what the hearth is without them!

Gabriel was strangely moved as he beheld that proud and solitary despair. An instinct of nature had hitherto checked him from actively aiding Lucretia in that struggle with his father which could but end in the destruction of one or the other. He had contented himself with forewarnings, with hints, with indirect suggestions; but now, all his sympathy was so strongly roused on her behalf, that the last faint scruple of filial conscience vanished into the abyss of blood, over which stood that lonely

Titaness. He drew near, and, clasping her hand, said, in a quick and broken voice—

"Listen! You know where to find proof of my fa——, that is, of—Dalibard's treason to the conspirators; you know the name of the man he dreads as an avenger, and you know that he waits but the proof to strike; but you do not know where to find that man, if his revenge is wanting for yourself. The police has not hunted him out; how can you? Accident has made me acquainted with one of his haunts. Give me a single promise, and I will put you at least upon that clue—weak, perhaps, but as yet the sole one to be followed. Promise me that, only in defence of your own life, not for mere jealousy, you will avail yourself of the knowledge, and you shall know all I do!"

"Do you think," said Lucretia, in a calm, cold voice, "that it is for jealousy, which is love, that I would murder all hope, all peace? for we have here—(and she smote her breast)—here, if not elsewhere, a heaven and a hell! Son, I will not harm your father, except in self-defence! But tell me nothing that may make the son a party in the father's doom."

"The father slew the mother," muttered Gabriel, between his clenched teeth; "and to me, you have well nigh supplied her place. Strike, if need be, in her name! If you are driven to want the arm of Pierre Guillot, seek news of him at the *Café Dufour, Rue S——, Boulevard du Temple.* Be calm now, I hear your husband's step."

A few days more, and Gabriel is gone! Wife and husband are alone with each other. Lucretia has refused to depart. Then that mute coma of horror! that suspense of two foes in the conflict of death—for the subtle prying eye of Olivier Dalibard sees that he himself is suspected—farther he shuns from sifting! Glance fastens on glance, and then hurries smilingly away. From the cup grins a skeleton—at the board warns a spectre. But how kind still the words, and how gentle the tone; and they lie down side by side in the marriage-bed—brain plotting against brain, heart loathing heart. It is a duel of life and death, between those sworn through life and beyond death at the altar. But it is carried on with all the forms and courtesies

of duel in the age of chivalry. No conjugal wrangling—no slip of the tongue; the oil is on the surface of the wave — the monsters in the hell of the abyss war invisibly below. At length, a dull torpor creeps over the woman—she feels the taint in her veins,—the slow victory is begun. What mattered all her vigilance and caution? Vainly glide from the pangs of the serpent, his very breath suffices to destroy! Pure seems the draught and wholesome the viand—that master of the science of murder needs not the means of the bungler! Then, keen and strong from the creeping lethargy started the fierce instinct of self and the ruthless impulse of revenge. Not too late yet to escape; for those subtle banes, that are to defy all detection, work but slowly to their end.

One evening, a woman, closely mantled, stood at watch by the angle of a wall. The light came dim and muffled from the window of a *café* hard at hand—the reflection slept amidst the shadows on the dark pavement, and, save a solitary lamp, swung at distance in the vista over the centre of the narrow street, no ray broke the gloom. The night was clouded and starless, the wind moaned in gusts, and the rain fell heavily; but the gloom and the loneliness did not appal the eye, and the wind did not chill the heart, and the rain fell unheeded on the head, of the woman at her post. At times, she paused in her slow, sentry-like pace to and fro, to look through the window of the *café*, and her gaze fell always on one figure seated apart from the rest. At length her pulse beat more quickly, and the patient lips smiled sternly. The figure had risen to depart. A man came out, and walked quickly up the street; the woman approached, and when the man was under the single lamp swung aloft, he felt his arm touched; the woman was at his side, and looking steadily into his face—

"You are Pierre Guillot, the Breton, the friend of George Cadoudal. Will you be his avenger?"

The Chouan's first impulse had been to place his hand in his vest, and something shone bright in the lamp-light, clasped in those iron fingers. The voice and the manner reassured him, and he answered readily—

"I am he whom you seek, and I only live to avenge."

"Read, then, and act," answered the woman, as she placed a paper in his hands.

* * * * *

At Laughton the babe is on the breast of the fair mother; and the father sits beside the bed; and mother and father dispute almost angrily whether mother or father those soft rounded features of slumbering infancy resemble most. At the red house, near the market-town, there is a hospitable bustle. William is home earlier than usual. Within the last hour, Susan has been thrice into every room. Husband and wife are now watching at the window. The good Fieldens, with a coach full of children, are expected, every moment, on a week's visit at least.

In the *café*, in the *Boulevard du Temple*, sit Pierre Guillot, the Chouan, and another of the old band of *brigands*, whom George Cadoudal had mustered in Paris. There is an expression of content on Guillot's countenance — it seems more open than usual, and there is a complacent smile on his lips. He is whispering low to his friend, in the intervals of eating, an employment pursued with the hearty gusto of a hungry man. But his friend does not seem to sympathise with the cheerful feelings of his comrade; he is pale, and there is terror on his face; and you may see that the journal in his hand trembles like a leaf.

In the gardens of the Tuileries, some score or so of gossips group together.

"And no news of the murderer?" asked one.

"No; but the man who had been friend to Robespierre must have made secret enemies enough."

"*Ce pauvre Dalibard!* He was not mixed up with the Terrorists nevertheless."

"Ah, but the more deadly for that, perhaps—a sly man was Olivier Dalibard!"

"What's the matter?" said an *employé*, lounging up to the group. "Are you talking of Olivier Dalibard? It is but the other day he had Marsan's appointment. He is now to have Pleyel's. I heard it two days ago—a capital thing! *Peste! il ira loin!* We shall have him a senator soon."

"Speak for yourself," quoth a *ci-devant* Abbé, with a laugh; "I should be sorry to see him again soon, wherever he be."

"*Plait-il ?*—I don't understand you!"

"Don't you know that Olivier Dalibard is murdered—found stabbed—in his own house, too!"

"*Ciel!* Pray tell me all you know. His place, then, is vacant!"

"Why, it seems that Dalibard, who had been brought up to medicine, was still fond of chemical experiments. He hired a room at the top of the house for such scientific amusements. He was accustomed to spend part of his nights there. They found him at morning, bathed in his blood, with three ghastly wounds in his side, and his fingers cut to the bone. He had struggled hard with the knife that butchered him."

"In his own house!" said a lawyer: "some servant or spendthrift heir!"

"He has no heir but young Bellanger, who will be *riche à millions*, and is now but a schoolboy at Lyons. No: it seems that the window was left open, and that it communicates with the roof-tops. There the murderer had entered, and by that way escaped, for they found the leads of the gutter dabbled with blood. The next house was uninhabited—easy enough to get in there, and lie *perdu* till night."

"Hum!" said the lawyer; "but the assassin could only have learned Dalibard's habits from some one in the house. Was the deceased married?"

"Oh, yes; to an Englishwoman."

"She had lovers, perhaps?"

"Pooh! lovers!—the happiest couple ever known! You should have seen them together. I dined there last week."

"It is strange!" said the lawyer.

"And he was getting on so well," muttered a hungry-looking man.

"And his place is vacant!" repeated the *employé*, as he quitted the crowd abstractedly.

In the house of Olivier Dalibard sits Lucretia alone, and in her own usual morning room. The officer appointed to such tasks by the French law has performed his visit, and made his

notes, and expressed condolence with the widow, and promised justice and retribution, and placed his seal on the locks till the representatives of the heir-at-law shall arrive; and the heir-at-law is the very boy who had succeeded so unexpectedly to the wealth of Jean Bellanger the contractor! But Lucretia has obtained beforehand all she wishes to save from the rest. An open box is on the floor, into which her hand drops noiselessly a volume in manuscript. On the forefinger of that hand is a ring, larger and more massive than those usually worn by women;—by Lucretia never worn before. Why should that ring have been selected with such care from the dead man's hoards? Why so precious the dull opal in that cumbrous setting? From the hand the volume drops without sound into the box, as those whom the secrets of the volume instruct you to destroy, may drop without noise into the grave. The trace of some illness, recent and deep, nor conquered yet, has ploughed lines in that young countenance, and dimmed the light of those searching eyes. Yet, courage! the poison is arrested—the poisoner is no more—minds like thine, stern woman, are cased in coffers of steel, and the rust as yet has gnawed no deeper than the surface. So, over that face, stamped with bodily suffering, plays a calm smile of triumph. The schemer has baffled the schemer! Turn now to the right, pass by that narrow corridor, you are in the marriage-chamber —the windows are closed. Tall tapers burn at the foot of the bed. Now go back to that narrow corridor; disregarded, thrown aside, are a cloth and a besom; the cloth is wet still; but here and there the red stains are dry, and clotted as with bloody glue; and the hairs of the besom start up, torn and ragged, as if the bristles had a sense of some horror—as if things inanimate still partook of men's dread at men's deeds. If you passed through the corridor and saw in the shadow of the wall that homeliest of instruments cast away and forgotten, you would smile at the slatternly housework. But if you knew that a corpse had been borne down those stairs to the left—borne along those floors to that marriage-bed, with the blood oozing, and gushing, and plashing below, as the bearers passed with their burthen, then, straight that dead

thing would take the awe of the dead being; it told its own tale of violence and murder; it had dabbled in the gore of the violated clay; it had become an evidence of the crime. No wonder that its hairs bristled up, sharp and ragged, in the shadow of the wall.

The first part of the tragedy ends. Let fall the curtain. When next it rises, years will have passed away, graves uncounted will have wrought fresh hollows in our merry sepulchre—sweet earth! Take a sand from the shore, take a drop from the ocean, less than sand-grain and drop in man's planet one Death and one Crime! On the map, trace all oceans, and search out every shore: more than seas, more than lands, in God's balance shall weigh one Death and one Crime!

PART THE SECOND.

PROLOGUE TO PART THE SECOND.

THE century has advanced. The rush of the deluge has ebbed back; the old landmarks have reappeared; the dynasties Napoleon willed into life have crumbled to the dust; the plough has passed over Waterloo; autumn after autumn the harvests have glittered on that grave of an empire. Through the immense ocean of universal change, we look back on the single track which our frail boat has cut through the waste. As a star shines impartially over the measureless expanse, though it seems to gild but *one* broken line into each eye; so, as our memory gazes on the past, the light spreads not over all the breadth of the waste, where nations have battled, and argosies gone down—it falls narrow and confined, along the single course we have taken: we lean over the small raft on which we float, and see the sparkles but reflected from the waves that it divides.

On the terrace at Laughton but *one* step paces slowly. The bride clings not now to the bridegroom's arm. Though pale and worn, it is still the same gentle face; but the blush of woman's love has gone from it evermore.

Charles Vernon (to call him still by the name in which he is best known to us) sleeps in the vault of the St. Johns. He had lived longer than he himself had expected, than his physician had hoped—lived, cheerful and happy, amidst quiet pursuits and innocent excitements. Three sons had blessed his hearth, to mourn over his grave. But the two elder were delicate and sickly. They did not long survive him, and died

within a few months of each other. The third seemed formed of a different mould and constitution from his brethren. To him descended the ancient heritage of Laughton, and he promised to enjoy it long.

It is Vernon's widow who walks alone in the stately terrace; sad still, for she loved well the choice of her youth, and she misses yet the children in the grave; from the date of Vernon's death, she wore mourning without and within; and the sorrows that came later, broke more the bruised reed; sad still, but resigned. One son survives; and earth yet has the troubled hopes and the holy fears of affection. Though that son be afar, in sport or in earnest, in pleasure or in toil, working out his destiny as man, still that step is less solitary than it seems. When does the son's image not walk beside the mother? Though she lives in seclusion, though the gay world tempts no more, the gay world is yet linked to her thoughts. From the distance she hears its murmurs in music. Her fancy still mingles with the crowd, and follows on, to her eye, outshining all the rest. Never vain in herself, she is vain now of another; and the small triumphs of the young and well-born seem trophies of renown to the eyes so tenderly deceived.

In the old-fashioned market-town still the business goes on, still the doors of the bank open and close every moment on the great day of the week; but the names over the threshold are partially changed. The junior partner is busy no more at the desk; not wholly forgotten—if his name still is spoken, it is not with thankfulness and praise. A something rests on the name—that something which dims and attaints—not proven, not certain, but suspected and dubious. The head shakes, the voice whispers,—and the attorney now lives in the solid red house at the verge of the town.

In the vicarage, Time, the old scythe-bearer, has not paused from his work. Still employed on Greek texts, little changed, save that his hair is grey, and that some lines in his kindly face tell of sorrows as of years, the Vicar sits in his parlour, but the children no longer, blithe-voiced and rose-cheeked, dart through the rustling espaliers. Those children, grave men, or staid matrons (save one whom Death chose, and

therefore now of all best beloved!) are at their posts in the world. The young ones are flown from the nest, and, with anxious wings, here and there, search food in their turn for their young. But the blithe voice and rose-cheek of the child make not that loss which the hearth misses the most. From childhood to manhood, and from manhood to departure, the natural changes are gradual and prepared. The absence most missed is that household life which presided, which kept things in order, and must be coaxed if a chair were displaced. That providence in trifles, that clasp of small links, that dear, bustling agency—now pleased, now complaining — dear alike in each change of its humour; that active life which has no self of its own;—like the mind of a poet, though its prose be the humblest, transferring self into others, with its right to be cross, and its charter to scold; for the motive is clear—it takes what it loves too anxiously to heart. The door of the parlour is open, the garden-path still passes before the threshold; but no step now has full right to halt at the door, and interrupt the grave thought on Greek texts;—no small talk on details and wise sayings chimes in with the wrath of *Medea*. The Prudent Genius is gone from the household: and perhaps as the good scholar now wearily pauses, and looks out on the silent garden, he would have given with joy all that Athens produced, from Æschylus to Plato, to hear again from the old familiar lips the lament on torn jackets, or the statistical economy of eggs!

But see, though the wife is no more, though the children have departed, the Vicar's home is not utterly desolate. See, along the same walk on which William soothed Susan's fears, and won her consent—see, what fairy advances? Is it Susan returned to youth? How like!—yet look again, and how unlike! The same, the pure, candid *regard*—the same, the clear, limpid blue of the eye—the same, that fair hue of the hair—light, but not auburn—more subdued, more harmonious than that equivocal colour which too nearly approaches to red. But how much more blooming and joyous than Susan's is that exquisite face in which all Hebe smiles forth—how much airier the tread, light with health—how much rounder, if slighter still, the wave of that undulating form! She smiles,—her lips move,—she is

conversing with herself,—she cannot be all silent, even when alone; for the sunny gladness of her nature must have vent like a bird's. But do not fancy that that gladness speaks the levity which comes from the absence of thought; it is rather from the depth of thought that it springs, as from the depth of a sea comes its music. See, while she pauses and listens, with her finger half-raised to her lip, as amidst that careless jubilee of birds she hears a note more grave and sustained,—the nightingale singing by day (as sometimes, though rarely, he is heard—perhaps because he misses his mate,—perhaps because he sees from his bower the creeping form of some foe to his race); see, as she listens now to that plaintive, low-chanted warble, how quickly the smile is sobered,—how the shade, soft and pensive, steals over the brow. It is but the mystic sympathy with Nature that bestows the smile or the shade. In that heart lightly moved beats the fine sense of the poet. It is the exquisite sensibility of the nerves that sends its blithe play to those spirits and from the clearness of the atmosphere comes, warm and ethereal, the ray of that light.

And does the roof of the pastor give shelter to Helen Mainwaring's youth? Has Death taken from her the natural protectors? Those forms which we saw so full of youth and youth's heart, in that very spot,—has the grave closed on them yet? *Yet!* — how few attain to the age of the Psalmist! Twenty-seven years have passed since that date; how often, in those years, have the dark doors opened for the young as for the old! William Mainwaring died first, careworn and shame-bowed; the blot on his name had cankered into his heart. Susan's life, always precarious, had struggled on, while he lived, by the strong power of affection and will; she would not die, for who then could console him? but at his death the power gave way. She lingered, but lingered dyingly, for three years; and then, for the first time since William's death, she smiled — that smile remained on the lips of the corpse. They had had many trials, that young couple whom we left so prosperous and happy! Not till many years after their marriage had one sweet consoler been born to them. In the season of poverty, and shame, and grief, it came; and there was no pride on Mainwaring's brow when

they placed his first-born in his arms. By her will, the widow consigned Helen to the joint guardianship of Mr. Fielden and her sister; but the latter was abroad, her address unknown, so the Vicar for two years had had sole charge of the orphan. She was not unprovided for. The sum that Susan brought to her husband had been long since gone, it is true — lost in the calamity which had wrecked William Mainwaring's name and blighted his prospects; but Helen's grandfather, the land-agent, had died some time subsequent to that event, and, indeed, just before William's death. He had never forgiven his son the stain on his name,—never assisted, never even seen him since that fatal day; but he left to Helen a sum of about 8000*l.*,—for she, at least, was innocent. In Mr. Fielden's eyes, Helen was therefore an heiress. And who amongst his small range of acquaintance was good enough for her? not only so richly portioned, but so lovely,—accomplished, too, for her parents had of late years lived chiefly in France, and languages there are easily learned, and masters cheap! Mr. Fielden knew but one, whom Providence had also consigned to his charge — the supposed son of his old pupil Ardworth; but though a tender affection existed between the two young persons, it seemed too like that of brother and sister to afford much ground for Mr. Fielden's anxiety or hope.

From his window the Vicar observed the still attitude of the young orphan for a few moments, then he pushed aside his books, rose, and approached her. At the sound of his tread, she woke from her reverie, and bounded lightly towards him.

"Ah, you would not see me before!" she said, in a voice in which there was the slightest possible foreign accent, which betrayed the country in which her childhood had been passed; "I peeped in twice at the window. I wanted you so much to walk to the village. But you will come now, will you not?" added the girl, coaxingly, as she looked up at him under the shade of her straw hat.

"And what do you want in the village, my pretty Helen?"

"Why, you know it is fair day, and you promised Bessie that you would buy her a fairing—to say nothing of me."

"Very true, and I ought to look in; it will help to keep the poor people from drinking. A clergyman should mix with his parishioners in their holidays. We must not associate our office only with grief, and sickness, and preaching. We will go. And what fairing are you to have?"

"Oh, something very brilliant, I promise you! I have formed grand notions of a fair. I am sure it must be like the bazaars we read of last night in that charming *Tour in the East*."

The Vicar smiled, half benignly, half anxiously. "My dear child, it is so like you to suppose a village fair must be an Eastern bazaar. If you always thus judge of things by your fancy, how this sober world will deceive you, poor Helen!"

"It is not my fault—*ne me grondez pas, méchant*," answered Helen, hanging her head. "But come, sir, allow, at least, that if I let my romance, as you call it, run away with me now and then, I can still content myself with the reality. What, you shake your head still? Don't you remember the sparrow?"

"Ha! ha! yes—the sparrow that the pedlar sold you for a goldfinch; and you were so proud of your purchase, and wondered so much why you could not coax the goldfinch to sing, till at last the paint wore away, and it was only a poor little sparrow!"

"Go on! Confess; did I fret then? Was I not as pleased with my dear sparrow as I should have been with the prettiest goldfinch that ever sang? Does not the sparrow follow me about, and nestle on my shoulder—dear little thing! And I was right after all; for if I had not fancied it a goldfinch, I should not have bought it, perhaps. But now I would not change it for a goldfinch—no, not even for that nightingale I heard just now. So let me still fancy the poor fair a bazaar; it is a double pleasure, first to fancy the bazaar, and then to be surprised at the fair."

"You argue well," said the Vicar, as they now entered the village; "I really think, in spite of all your turn for poetry, and Goldsmith, and Cowper, that you would take as kindly to mathematics as your cousin John Ardworth, poor lad!"

"Not if mathematics have made him so grave—and so

churlish, I was going to say;—but that word does him wrong. Dear cousin, so kind and so rough!"

"It is not mathematics that are to blame, if he is grave and absorbed," said the Vicar, with a sigh; "it is the two cares that gnaw most—poverty and ambition."

"Nay, do not sigh; it must be such a pleasure to feel, as he does, that one must triumph at last!"

"Umph!—John must have nearly reached London by this time," said Mr. Fielden, "for he is a stout walker, and this is the third day since he left us. Well, now that he is about fairly to be called to the bar, I hope that his fever will cool, and he will settle calmly to work. I have felt great pain for him during this last visit."

"Pain! But why?"

"My dear, do you remember what I read to you both from Sir William Temple the night before John left us?"

Helen put her hand to her brow, and with a readiness which showed a memory equally quick and retentive, replied, "Yes; was it not to this effect? I am not sure of the exact words—'To have something we have not, and be something we are not, is the root of all evil.'"

"Well remembered, my darling!"

"Ah, but," said Helen, archly, "I remember too what my cousin replied, 'If Sir William Temple had practised his theory, he would not have been ambassador at the Hague, or——'"

"Pshaw! the boy's always ready enough with his answers," interrupted Mr. Fielden, rather petulantly. "There's the fair, my dear; more in your way, I see, than Sir William Temple's philosophy."

And Helen was right—the fair was no Eastern bazaar; but how delighted that young, impressionable mind was, notwithstanding! delighted with the swings and the roundabouts, the shows, the booths, even down to the gilt gingerbread kings and queens! All minds genuinely poetical are peculiarly susceptible to movement—that is, to the excitement of numbers. If the movement is sincerely joyous, as in the mirth of a village holiday, such a nature shares insensibly in the joy. But if the movement is a false and spurious gaiety, as in a state ball,

where the impassive face and languid step are out of harmony with the evident object of the scene—then the nature we speak of feels chilled and dejected. Hence it really is, that the more delicate and ideal order of minds soon grow inexpressibly weary of the hack routine of what are called fashionable pleasures. Hence the same person most alive to a dance on the green, would be without enjoyment at Almack's. It was not because one scene is a village green, and the other a room in King Street; nor is it because the actors in the one are of the humble, in the others of the noble class, but simply because the enjoyment in the first is visible and hearty, because in the other it is a listless and melancholy pretence. Helen fancied it was the swings and the booths that gave her that innocent exhilaration—it was not so; it was the unconscious sympathy with the crowd around her. When the poetical nature quits its own dreams for the actual world, it enters, and transfuses itself into the hearts and humours of others. The two wings of that spirit which we call Genius, are reverie and sympathy. But poor little Helen had no idea that she had genius. Whether chasing the butterfly, or talking fond fancies to her birds, or whether with earnest, musing eyes watching the stars come forth, and the dark pine-trees gleam into silver; whether with airy day-dreams and credulous wonder poring over the magic tales of Mirglip or Aladdin, or whether spellbound to awe by the solemn woes of *Lear*, or following the blind great bard into "the heaven of heavens, an earthly guest, to draw empyreal air," she obeyed but the honest and varying impulse in each change of her pliant mood; and would have ascribed with genuine humility to the vagaries of childhood, that prompt gathering of pleasure—that quick-shifting sport of the fancy by which Nature binds to itself, in chains undulating as melody the lively senses of genius.

While Helen, leaning on the Vicar's arm, thus surrendered herself to the innocent excitement of the moment, the Vicar himself smiled and nodded to his parishioners, or paused to exchange a friendly word or two with the youngest or the eldest loiterers (those two extremes of mortality which the Church so tenderly unites), whom the scene drew to its tempting vortex,

when a rough-haired lad, with a leather bag strapped across his waist, turned from one of the gingerbread booths, and touching his hat, said, "Please you, sir, I was a-coming to your house with a letter."

The Vicar's correspondence was confined and rare, despite his distant children, for letters but a few years ago were costly luxuries to persons of narrow income, and therefore the juvenile letter-carrier who plied between the post-town and the village failed to excite in his breast that indignation for being an hour or more behind his time which would have animated one to whom the post brings the usual event of the day. He took the letter from the boy's hand, and paid for it with a thrifty sigh, as he glanced at a handwriting unfamiliar to him—perhaps from some clergyman poorer than himself. However, that was not the place to read letters, so he put the epistle in his pocket, until Helen, who watched his countenance to see when he grew tired of the scene, kindly proposed to return home. As they gained a stile half-way, Mr. Fielden remembered his letter, took it forth, and put on his spectacles. Helen stooped over the bank to gather violets; the Vicar seated himself on the stile. As he again looked at the address, the handwriting, before unfamiliar, seemed to grow indistinctly on his recollection. That bold, firm hand—thin and fine as woman's but large and regular as man's—was too peculiar to be forgotten. He uttered a brief exclamation of surprise and recognition, and hastily broke the seal. The contents ran thus:—

"DEAR SIR,—So many years have passed since any communication has taken place between us, that the name of Lucretia Dalibard will seem more strange to you than that of Lucretia Clavering. I have recently returned to England after long residence abroad. I perceive by my deceased sister's will that she has confided her only daughter to my guardianship, conjointly with yourself. I am anxious to participate in that tender charge. I am alone in the world—an habitual sufferer—afflicted with a partial paralysis that deprives me of the use of my limbs. In such circumstances, it is the more natural that I should turn to the only relative left me. My journey to

England has so exhausted my strength, and all movement is so painful, that I must request you to excuse me for not coming in person for my niece. Your benevolence, however, will, I am sure, prompt you to afford me the comfort of her society, and as soon as you can contrive some suitable arrangement for her journey. Begging you to express to Helen, in my name, the assurance of such a welcome as is due from me to my sister's child, and waiting with great anxiety your reply,—I am, dear Sir, your very faithful servant, LUCRETIA DALIBARD.

"P.S. I can scarcely venture to ask you to bring Helen yourself to town, but I should be glad if other inducements to take the journey afforded me the pleasure of seeing you once again. I am anxious, in addition to such details of my late sister as you may be enabled to give me, to learn something of the history of her connection with Mr. Ardworth, in whom I felt much interested years ago, and who, I am recently informed, left an infant, his supposed son, under your care. So long absent from England, how much have I to learn, and how little the mere gravestones tell us of the dead!"

While the Vicar is absorbed in this letter equally unwelcome and unexpected,—while, unconscious as the daughter of Ceres gathering flowers when the Hell King drew near, of the change that awaited her and the grim presence that approached on her fate,—Helen bends still over the bank odorous with shrinking violets, we turn where the new generation equally invites our gaze, and make our first acquaintance with two persons connected with the progress of our tale.

* * * * *

The britska stopped. The servant, who had been gradually accumulating present dust and future rheumatisms on the "bad eminence" of a rumble-tumble, exposed to the nipping airs of an English sky, leapt to the ground, and opened the carriage-door.

"This is the best place for the view, sir—a little to the right."

Percival St. John threw aside his book (a volume of Voyages), whistled to a spaniel dozing by his side, and descended lightly.

Light was the step of the young man, and merry was the bark of the dog, as it chased from the road the startled sparrow, rising high into the clear air—favourites of Nature both, man and dog! You had but to glance at Percival St. John to know at once that he was of the race that toils not; the assured step spoke confidence in the world's fair smile. No care for the morrow dimmed the bold eye and the radiant bloom.

About the middle height—his slight figure, yet undeveloped, seemed not to have attained to its full growth—the darkening down only just shaded a cheek somewhat sunburnt, though naturally fair, round which locks black as jet played sportively in the fresh air—about him altogether there was the inexpressible charm of happy youth. He scarcely looked sixteen though above four years older; but for his firm though careless step, and the open fearlessness of his frank eye, you might have almost taken him for a girl in men's clothes; not from effeminacy of feature, but from the sparkling bloom of his youth, and from his unmistakable newness to the cares and sins of man. A more delightful vision of ingenuous boyhood opening into life, under happy auspices, never inspired with pleased yet melancholy interest the eye of half-envious, half-pitying age.

"And that," mused Percival St. John—"that is London! Oh, for the *Diable Boiteux* to unroof me those distant houses, and show me the pleasures that lurk within! Ah, what long letters I shall have to write home! How the dear old Captain will laugh over them, and how my dear good mother will put down her work and sigh! Home!—Um, I miss it already. How strange and grim, after all, the huge city seems!"

His glove fell to the ground, and his spaniel mumbled it into shreds. The young man laughed, and, throwing himself on the grass, played gaily with the dog.

"Fie, Beau, sir,—fie; gloves are indigestible. Restrain your appetite, and we'll lunch together at the Clarendon."

At this moment there arrived at the same patch of greensward a pedestrian some years older than Percival St. John—a tall, muscular, raw-boned, dust-covered, travel-stained pedestrian—one of your pedestrians in good earnest—no amateur in neat gambroon, manufactured by Inkson, who leaves his

carriage behind him, and walks on with his fishing-rod by choice, but a sturdy wanderer, with thick shoes and strapless trousers, a threadbare coat and a knapsack at his back. Yet, withal, the young man had the air of a gentleman; not gentleman as the word is understood in St. James's, the gentleman of the noble and idle class, but the gentleman as the title is accorded, by courtesy, to all to whom both education and the habit of mixing with educated persons gives a claim to the distinction and imparts an air of refinement. The new comer was strongly built, at once lean and large—far more strongly built than Percival St. John, but without his look of cheerful and comely health. His complexion had not the florid hues that should have accompanied that strength of body; it was pale, though not sickly; the expression grave, the lines deep, the face strongly marked. By his side trotted painfully a wiry, yellowish, footsore Scotch terrier. Beau sprang from his master's caress, cocked his handsome head on one side, and suspended in silent halt his right fore-paw. Percival cast over his left shoulder a careless glance at the intruder. The last heeded neither Beau nor Percival. He slipped his knapsack to the ground, and the Scotch terrier sank upon it, and curled himself up into a ball. The wayfarer folded his arms tightly upon his breast, heaved a short unquiet sigh, and cast over the giant city, from under deep-pent lowering brows, a look so earnest, so searching, so full of inexpressible, dogged, determined power, that Percival, roused out of his gay indifference, rose and regarded him with curious interest.

In the meanwhile, Beau had very leisurely approached the bilious-looking terrier; and after walking three times round him, with a stare and a small sniff of superb impertinence, halted with great composure, and lifting his hind leg—O Beau, Beau, Beau! your historian blushes for your breeding, and, like Sterne's recording angel, drops a tear upon the stain which washes it from the register—but not, alas! from the back of the bilious terrier! The space around was wide, Beau. You had all the world to choose; why select so specially for insult the single spot on which reposed the

worn-out and unoffending? O, dainty Beau!—O, dainty world! Own the truth, both of ye. There is something irresistibly provocative of insult in the back of a shabby-looking dog!

The poor terrier, used to affronts, raised its heavy eyelids, and shot the gleam of just indignation from its dark eyes. But it neither stirred nor growled, and Beau, extremely pleased with his achievement, wagged his tail in triumph, and returned to his master—perhaps, in parliamentary phrase, to "report proceedings, and ask leave to sit again."

"I wonder," soliloquised Percival St. John, "what that poor fellow is thinking of;—perhaps he *is* poor, indeed!—no doubt of it, now I look again. And I so rich! I should like to—hem, let's see what he's made of."

Herewith Percival approached, and with all a boy's half-bashful, half-saucy frankness, said—"A fine prospect, sir."

The pedestrian started, and threw a rapid glance over the brilliant figure that accosted him. Percival St. John was not to be abashed by stern looks; but that glance might have abashed many a more experienced man. The glance of a squire upon a corn-law missionary, of a Crockford dandy upon a Regent Street tiger, could not have been more disdainful.

"Tush!" said the pedestrian, rudely, and turned upon his heel.

Percival coloured, and, shall we own it? was boy enough to double his fist. Little would he have been deterred by the brawn of those great arms and the girth of that Herculean chest, if he had been quite sure that it was a proper thing to resent pugilistically so discourteous a monosyllable. The "tush!" stuck greatly in his throat. But the man, now removed to the farther verge of the hill, looked so tranquil and so lost in thought, that the short-lived anger died.

"And after all, if I were as poor as he looks, I dare say I should be just as proud," muttered Percival. "However, it's his own fault if he goes to London on foot, when I might, at least, have given him a lift. Come, Beau, sir."

With his face still a little flushed, and his hat unconsciously

cocked fiercely on one side, Percival sauntered back to his britska.

As in a whirl of dust, the light carriage was borne by the four posters down the hill, the pedestrian turned for an instant from the view before to the cloud behind, and muttered—"Ay, a fine prospect for the rich—a noble field for the poor!" The tone in which those words were said told volumes; there spoke the pride, the hope, the energy, the ambition, which make youth laborious, manhood prosperous, age renowned.

The stranger then threw himself on the sward, and continued his silent and intent contemplation till the clouds grew red in the west. When, then, he rose, his eye was bright, his mien erect, and a smile playing round his firm full lips stole the moody sternness from his hard face. Throwing his knapsack once more on his back, John Ardworth went resolutely on to the great vortex

CHAPTER I.

THE CORONATION.

THE eighth of September, 1831, was a holiday in London. William the Fourth received the crown of his ancestors in that mighty church in which the most impressive monitors to human pomp are the monuments of the dead. The dust of conquerors and statesmen, of the wise heads and the bold hands that had guarded the thrones of departed kings slept around; and the great men of the Modern time were assembled in homage to the monarch, to whom the prowess and the liberty of generations had bequeathed an empire in which the sun never sets. In the Abbey—thinking little of the past, caring little for the future—the immense audience gazed eagerly on the pageant that occurs but once in that division of history—the lifetime of a king. The assemblage was brilliant and imposing. The galleries sparkled with the gems of women who still upheld the celebrity for form and feature which, from the remotest times, has been awarded to the great English race. Below, in their robes and coronets,

were men who neither in the senate nor the field have shamed their fathers. Conspicuous amongst all for grandeur of mien and stature towered the brothers of the king! while, commanding yet more the universal gaze, were seen, here the eagle features of the old hero of Waterloo, and there the majestic brow of the haughty statesman who was leading the people (while the last of the Bourbons, whom Waterloo had restored to the Tuileries, had left the orb and purple to the kindred house, so fatal to his name) through a stormy and perilous transition to a bloodless revolution and a new charter.

Tier upon tier, in the division set apart for them, the members of the Lower House moved and murmured above the pageant; and the coronation of the new sovereign was connected in their minds with the great measure which, still undecided, made at that time a link between the People and the King; and arrayed against both, if not, indeed, the real Aristocracy, at least the Chamber recognised by the Constitution as its representative. Without the space was one dense mass. Houses, from balcony to balcony, window to window, were filled as some immense theatre. Up, through the long thoroughfare to Whitehall, the eye saw that audience—A PEOPLE; and the gaze was bounded at the spot where Charles the First had passed from the banquet-house to the scaffold.

The ceremony was over; the procession had swept slowly by; the last huzza had died away. And, after staring a while upon Orator Hunt, who had clambered up the iron palisade near Westminster Hall, to exhibit his goodly person in his court attire, the serried crowds, hurrying from the shower which then unseasonably descended, broke into large masses or lengthening columns.

In that part of London which may be said to form a boundary between its old and its new world, by which, on the one hand, you pass to Westminster, or through that gorge of the Strand, which leads along endless rows of shops that have grown up on the sites of the ancient halls of the Salisburys and the Exeters, the Buckinghams and Southamptons, to the heart of the City built around the primeval palace of the "Tower,"—while, on the other hand, you pass into the new city of aristocracy and letters.

of art and fashion, embracing the whilom chase of Marylebone, and the once sedge-grown waters of Pimlico;—by this ignoble boundary (the crossing from the Opera House, at the bottom of the Haymarket to the commencement of Charing Cross), stood a person whose discontented countenance was in singular contrast with the general gaiety and animation of the day. This person, O gentle reader—this sour, querulous, discontented person,—was a king, too, in his own walk! None might dispute it. He feared no rebel; he was harassed by no reform; he ruled without ministers. Tools he had; but, when worn out, he replaced them without a pension or a sigh. He lived by taxes—but they were voluntary; and his Civil List was supplied without demand for the redress of grievances. This person, nevertheless—not deposed, was suspended from his empire for the day. He was pushed aside; he was forgotten. He was not distinct from the crowd. Like Titus, he had lost a day—his vocation was gone. This person was the Sweeper of the Crossing!

He was a character! He was young, in the fairest prime of youth; but it was the face of an old man on young shoulders. His hair was long, thin, and prematurely streaked with grey his face was pale, and deeply furrowed; his eyes hollow, and their stare gleamed, cold and stolid, under his bent and shaggy brows. The figure was at once fragile and ungainly—and the narrow shoulders curved in a perpetual stoop. It was a person once noticed that you would easily remember, and associate with some undefined, painful impression. The manner was humble, but not meek; the voice was whining, but without pathos. There was a meagre, passionless dulness about the aspect, though, at times, it quickened into a kind of avid acuteness. No one knew by what human parentage this personage came into the world. He had been reared by the charity of a stranger, crept through childhood, and misery, and rags mysteriously; and suddenly succeeded an old defunct negro in the profitable crossing whereat he is now standing. All education was unknown to him, so was all love. In those festive haunts at St. Giles's, where he who would see "Life in London" may often discover the boy who has held his horse in the morning

dancing merrily with his chosen damsel at night, our sweeper's character was austere as Charles the Twelfth's. And the poor creature had his good qualities! He was sensitively alive to kindness—little enough had been shown him to make the luxury the more prized from its rarity!—though fond of money, he would part with it (we do not say cheerfully, but part with it still), not to mere want, indeed (for he had been too pinched and starved himself, and had grown too obtuse to pinching and to starving for the sensitiveness that prompts to charity), but to any of his companions who had done him a good service, or who had even warmed his dull heart by a friendly smile; he was honest, too—honest to the backbone. You might have trusted him with gold untold. Through the heavy clod which man's care had not moulded, nor books enlightened, nor the priest's solemn lore informed, still natural rays from the great parent source of Deity struggled, fitful and dim. He had no lawful name; none knew if sponsors had ever stood security for his sins at the sacred fount. But he had christened himself by the strange, unchristianlike name of "Beck." There he was, then, seemingly without origin, parentage, or kindred tie—a lonesome, squalid, bloodless thing, which the great monster, London, seemed to have spawned forth of its own self—one of its sickly, miserable, rickety offspring, whom it puts out at nurse to Penury, at school to Starvation, and, finally, and literally, gives them stones for bread, with the option of the gallows or the dunghill, when the desperate offspring calls on the giant mother for return and home!

And this creature did love something—loved, perhaps, some fellow-being—of that hereafter, when we dive into the secrets of his privacy. Meanwhile, openly and frankly, he loved his crossing; he was proud of his crossing; he was grateful to his crossing. God help thee, son of the street—why not? He had in it a double affection; that of serving and being served. He kept the crossing—if the crossing kept him. He smiled at times to himself when he saw it lie fair and brilliant amidst the mire around; it bestowed on him a sense of property! What a man may feel for a fine estate in a ring fence, Beck felt for that isthmus of the kennel which was subject to his broom! The

coronation had made one rebellious spirit, when it swept the sweeper from his crossing.

He stood then half under the colonnade of the Opera House, as the crowd now rapidly grew thinner and more scattered: and when the last carriage of a long string of vehicles had passed by, he muttered audibly—

"It'll take a deal of pains to make she right agin!"

"So you be's 'ere to-day, Beck!" said a ragamuffin boy, who, pushing and scrambling through his betters, now halted, and wiped his forehead as he looked at the sweeper. "Vy, ve are all out pleasuring. Vy von't you come with ve?—lots of fun!"

The sweeper scowled at the urchin, and made no answer, but began sedulously to apply himself to the crossing.

"Vy, there isn't another sweep in the streets, Beck. His Majesty King Bill's currynation makes all on us so 'appy!"

"It has made *she* unkimmon dirty!" returned Beck, pointing to the dingy crossing, scarce distinguished from the rest of the road.

The ragamuffin laughed.

"But ve be's goin' to 'ave Reform now, Beck. The peopul's to have their rights and libties, hand the luds is to be put down, hand beefsteaks is to be a penny a pound, and——"

"What good will that do to she?"

"Vy, man, ve shall take turn about, and sum vun helse will sveep the crossings, and ve shall ride in sum vun helse's coach and four praps—cos vy? ve shall hall be hequals!"

"Hequals! I tells you vot, if you keeps jawing there, atween me and she, I shall vop you, Joe—cos vy? I be's the biggest!" was the answer of Beck the sweeper to Joe the ragamuffin.

The jovial Joe laughed aloud, snapped his fingers, threw up his ragged cap with a shout for King Bill, and set off scampering and whooping to join those festivities which Beck had so churlishly disdained.

Time crept on—evening began to close in, and Beck was still at his crossing, when a young gentleman on horseback, who, after seeing the procession, had stolen away for a quiet

ride in the suburbs, reined in close by the crossing, and looking round, as for some one to hold his horse, could discover no loiterer worthy that honour except the solitary Beck. So young was the rider that he seemed still a boy. On his smooth countenance all that most prepossesses in early youth left its witching stamp. A smile, at once gay and sweet, played on his lips. There was a charm, even in a certain impatient petulance, in his quick eye, and the slight contraction of his delicate brows. Almaviva might well have been jealous of such a page! He was the *beau idéal* of Cherubino. He held up his whip, with an arch sign, to the sweeper. "Follow, my man," he said, in a tone, the very command of which sounded gentle, so blithe was the movement of the lips, and so silvery the easy accent; and without waiting, he cantered carelessly down Pall Mall.

The sweeper cast a rueful glance at his melancholy domain. But he had gained but little that day, and the offer was too tempting to be rejected. He heaved a sigh, shouldered his broom, and murmuring to himself that he would give her a last brush before he retired for the night, he put his long limbs into that swinging, shambling trot, which characterises the motion of those professional jackals, who, having once caught sight of a groomless rider, fairly hunt him down, and appear when he least expects it, the instant he dismounts.

The young rider lightly swung himself from his sleek high-bred grey, at the door of one of the clubs in St. James's Street, patted his horse's neck, chucked the rein to the sweeper, and sauntered into the house, whistling musically—if not from want of thought, certainly from want of care.

As he entered the club, two or three men, young indeed, but much older, to appearance at least, than himself, who were dining together at the same table, nodded to him their friendly greeting.

"Ah, Perce," said one, "we have only just sat down—here is a seat for you."

The boy blushed shyly, as he accepted the proposal, and the young men made room for him at the table, with a

smiling alacrity which showed that his shyness was no hindrance to his popularity.

"Who," said an elderly dandy, dining apart with one of his contemporaries—"who is that lad? One ought not to admit such mere boys into the club."

"He is the only surviving son of an old friend of ours," answered the other, dropping his eyeglass. "Young Percival St. John."

"St. John! What! Vernon St. John's son?"

"Yes."

"He has not his father's good air. These young fellows have a tone—a something—a want of self-possession, eh?"

"Very true. The fact is, that Percival was meant for the navy, and even served as a mid for a year or so. He was a younger son, then—third, I think. The two elder ones died, and Master Percival walked into the inheritance. I don't think he is quite of age yet."

"Of age! he does not look seventeen!"

"Oh, he is more than that! I remember him in his jacket at Laughton. A fine property!"

"Ay, I don't wonder those fellows are so civil to him. This claret is corked!—everything is so bad at this d—d club!—no wonder, when a troop of boys are let in!—enough to spoil any club—don't know Larose from Lafitte! Waiter!"

Meanwhile, the talk round the table at which sat Percival St. John, was animated, lively, and various—the talk common with young idlers; of horses, and steeple-chases, and opera-dancers, and reigning beauties, and good-humoured jests at each other. In all this babble, there was a freshness about Percival St. John's conversation, which showed that, as yet, for him life had the zest of novelty. He was more at home about horses and steeple-chases, than about opera-dancers, and beauties, and the small scandals of town. Talk on these latter topics did not seem to interest him; on the contrary, almost to pain. Shy and modest as a girl, he coloured or looked aside when his more hardened friends boasted of assignations and love-affairs. Spirited, gay, and manly enough in all really manly points, the virgin bloom of innocence was yet visible in

his frank charming manner. And often, out of respect for his delicacy, some hearty son of pleasure stopped short in his narrative, or lost the point of his anecdote; and yet so lovable was Percival in his good humour, his *naïveté*, his joyous entrance into innocent joy, that his companions were scarcely conscious of the *gêne* and restraint he imposed on them. Those merry, dark eyes, and that flashing smile, were conviviality of themselves. They brought with them a contagious cheerfulness, which compensated for the want of corruption.

Night had set in. St. John's companions had departed to their several haunts, and Percival himself stood on the steps of the club, resolving that he would join the crowds that swept through the streets to gaze on the illuminations, when he perceived Beck (still at the rein of his dozing horse), whom he had quite forgot till that moment. Laughing at his own want of memory, Percival put some silver into Beck's hand — more silver than Beck had ever before received for similar service —and said:

"Well, my man, I suppose I can trust you to take my horse to his stables—No. —, the Mews, behind Curzon Street. Poor fellow, he wants his supper,—and you, too, I suppose!"

Beck smiled—a pale, hungry smile, and pulled his forelock politely.

"I can take the oss werry safely, your onor."

"Take him, then, and good evening; but don't get on, for your life."

"Oh no, sir; I never gets on: 'taint in my vays."

And Beck slowly led the horse through the crowd, till he vanished from Percival's eyes.

Just then, a man passing through the street paused as he saw the young gentleman on the steps of the club, and said, gaily, "Ah! how do you do? Pretty faces in plenty out to-night Which way are you going?"

"That is more than I can tell you, Mr. Varney. I was just thinking which turn to take—the right or the left."

"Then let me be your guide" and Varney offered his arm.

Percival accepted the courtesy; and the two walked on towards Piccadilly Many a kind glance from the milliners

and maidservants whom the illuminations drew abroad, roved, somewhat impartially, towards St. John and his companion; but they dwelt longer on the last, for *there*, at least, they were sure of a return. Varney, if not in his first youth, was still in the prime of life; and Time had dealt with him so leniently, that he retained all the personal advantages of youth itself. His complexion still was clear; and as only his upper lip, decorated with a slight silken and well-trimmed moustache, was unshaven, the contour of the face added to the juvenility of his appearance by the rounded symmetry it betrayed. His hair escaped from his hat in fair unchanged luxuriance. And the nervous figure, agile as a panther's, though broad-shouldered and deep-chested, denoted all the slightness and elasticity of twenty-five, combined with the muscular power of forty. His dress was rather fantastic—too showy for the good taste which is habitual to the English gentleman—and there was a peculiarity in his gait almost approaching to a strut, which bespoke a desire of effect—a consciousness of personal advantages—equally opposed to the mien and manner of Percival's usual companions,; yet withal, even the most fastidious would have hesitated to apply to Gabriel Varney the epithet of "vulgar." Many turned to look again; but it was not to remark the dress, or the slight swagger;—an expression of reckless, sinister power in the countenance—something of vigour and determination even in that very walk, foppish as it would have been in most, made you sink all observation of the mere externals, in a sentiment of curiosity towards the man himself. He seemed a somebody—not a somebody of conventional rank, but a somebody of personal individuality—an artist perhaps, a poet, or a soldier in some foreign service, but certainly a man whose name you would expect to have heard of. Amongst the common mob of passengers he stood out in marked and distinct relief.

"I feel at home in a crowd," said Varney. "Do you understand me?"

"I think so," answered Percival. "If ever I could become distinguished, I, too, should feel at home in a crowd."

"You have ambition, then? you mean to become distinguished?" asked Varney, with a sharp, searching look.

There was a deeper and steadier flash than usual from Percival's dark eyes, and a manlier glow over his cheek, at Varney's question. But he was slow in answering; and when he did so, his manner had all its wonted mixture of graceful bashfulness and gay candour.

"Our rise does not always depend on ourselves. We are not all born great, nor do we all have 'greatness thrust on us.'"

"One can be what one likes, with your fortune," said Varney; and there was a growl of envy in his voice.

"What, be a painter like you! Ha, ha!"

"Faith," said Varney, "at least, if you could paint at all, you would have what I have not—praise and fame."

Percival pressed kindly on Varney's arm. "Courage! you will get justice some day!"

Varney shook his head. "Bah! there is no such thing as justice; all are underrated or overrated. Can you name one man who you think is estimated by the public at his precise value? As for present popularity, it depends on two qualities —each singly, or both united—cowardice and charlatanism; that is, servile compliance with the taste and opinion of the moment, or a quack's spasmodic efforts at originality. But why bore you on such matters? There are things more attractive round us. A good ankle that, eh? Why, pardon me, it is strange; but you don't seem to care much for women?"

"Oh yes, I do," said Percival, with a sly demureness. "I am very fond of—my mother!"

"Very proper and filial," said Varney, laughing; "and does your love for the sex stop there?"

"Well, and in truth I fancy so—pretty nearly. You know my grandmother is not alive! But *that* is something really worth looking at!" And Percival pointed, almost with a child's delight, at an illumination more brilliant than the rest.

"I suppose, when you come of age, you will have all the cedars at Laughton hung with coloured lamps. Ah, you must ask me there some day. I should so like to see the old place again."

"You never saw it, I think you say, in my poor father's time?"

"Never."

"Yet you knew him."

"But slightly."

"And you never saw my mother?"

"No; but she seems to have such influence over you, that I am sure she must be a very superior person—rather proud, I suppose."

"Proud—no; that is, not exactly proud, for she is very meek and very affable. But yet——"

"But yet—you hesitate—she would not like you to be seen, perhaps, walking in Piccadilly with Gabriel Varney, the natural son of old Sir Miles's librarian,—Gabriel Varney the painter—Gabriel Varney the adventurer!"

"As long as Gabriel Varney is a man without stain on his character and honour, my mother would only be pleased that I should know an able and accomplished person whatever his origin or parentage. But my mother would be sad if she knew me intimate with a Bourbon or a Raffaelle, the first in rank or the first in genius, if either prince or artist had lost or even sullied his scutcheon of gentleman. In a word, she is most sensitive as to honour and conscience—all else she disregards."

"Hem!" Varney stooped down, as if examining the polish of his boot, while he continued, carelessly—"Impossible to walk the streets and keep one's boots out of the mire! Well—and you agree with your mother?"

"It would be strange if I did not. When I was scarcely four years old, my poor father used to lead me through the long picture-gallery at Laughton, and say, 'Walk through life as if those brave gentlemen looked down on you.' And," added St. John with his ingenuous smile—"my mother would put in her word—'And those unstained women, too, my Percival.'"

There was something noble and touching in the boy's low accents as he said this; it gave the key to his unusual modesty, and his frank, healthful innocence of character.

The devil in Varney's lip sneered mockingly.

"My young friend, you have never loved yet. Do you think you ever shall?"

"I have dreamed that I could love one day. But I can wait."

Varney was about to reply, when he was accosted abruptly by three men of that exaggerated style of dress and manner, which is implied by the vulgar appellation of "Tigrish." Each of the three men had a cigar in his mouth—each seemed flushed with wine. One wore long brass spurs and immense moustaches; another was distinguished by an enormous surface of black satin cravat, across which meandered a Pactolus of gold chain; a third had his coat laced and braided *à la Polonaise*, and pinched and padded *à la Russe*, with trousers shaped to the calf of a sinewy leg, and a glass screwed into his right eye.

"Ah, Gabriel!—ah, Varney!—ah, prince of good fellows, well met! You sup with us to-night at little *Céleste's*—we were just going in search of you."

"Who's your friend—one of us?" whispered a second.

And the third screwed his arm tight and lovingly into Varney's.

Gabriel, despite his habitual assurance, looked abashed for a moment, and would have extricated himself from cordialities not at that moment welcome; but he saw that his friends were too far gone in their cups to be easily shaken off, and he felt relieved when Percival, after a dissatisfied glance at the three, said, quietly—"I must detain you no longer—I shall soon look in at your studio;" and, without waiting for an answer, slid off, and was lost among the crowd.

Varney walked on with his new-found friends, unheeding for some moments their loose remarks and familiar banter. At length he shook off his abstraction, and surrendering himself to the coarse humours of his companions, soon eclipsed them all by the gusto of his slang, and the mocking profligacy of his sentiments; for here he no longer played a part, or suppressed his grosser instincts. That uncurbed dominion of the senses, to which his very boyhood had abandoned itself, found a willing slave in the man. Even the talents themselves that he displayed

came from the cultivation of the sensual. His eye, studying externals, made him a painter,—his ear, quick and practised, a musician. His wild, prodigal fancy rioted on every excitement, and brought him in a vast harvest of experience in knowledge of the frailties and the vices on which it indulged its vagrant experiments. Men who over-cultivate the art that connects itself with the senses, with little counterpoise from the reason and pure intellect, are apt to be dissipated and irregular in their lives. This is frequently noticeable in the biographies of musicians, singers, and painters; less so in poets, because he who deals with words, not signs and tones, must perpetually compare his senses with the pure images of which the senses only see the appearances; in a word, he must employ his intellect, and his self-education must be large and comprehensive. But with most real genius, however fed merely by the senses,—most really great painters, singers, and musicians, however easily led astray into temptation, the richness of the soil throws up abundant good qualities to countervail or redeem the evil ; they are usually compassionate, generous, sympathising. That Varney had not such beauties of soul and temperament it is unnecessary to add, —principally, it is true, because of his nurture, education, parental example, the utter corruption in which his childhood and youth had passed,—partly because he had no *real* genius ; it was a false apparition of the divine spirit, reflected from the exquisite perfection of his frame (which rendered all his senses so vigorous and acute), and his riotous fancy, and his fitful energy, which was capable at times of great application, but not of definite purpose or earnest study. All about him was flashy and hollow. He had not the natural subtlety and depth of mind that had characterised his terrible father. The graft of the opera-dancer was visible on the stock of the scholar; wholly without the habits of method and order, without the patience, without the mathematical calculating brain of Dalibard, he played wantonly with the horrible and loathsome wickedness of which Olivier had made dark and solemn study. Extravagant and lavish, he spent money as fast as he gained it; he threw away all chances of eminence and career. In the midst of the direst plots of his villany, or the most energetic pursuit of his

art, the poorest excitement, the veriest bauble would draw him aside. His heart was with Falri in the sty, his fancy with Aladdin in the palace. To make a show was his darling object; he loved to create effect by his person, his talk, his dress, as well as by his talents. Living from hand to mouth, crimes, through which it is not our intention to follow him, had at times made him rich to-day, for vices to make him poor again to-morrow. What he called "luck," or "his star," had favoured him—he *was not hanged!*—he lived; and, as the greater part of his unscrupulous career had been conducted in foreign lands, and under other names—in his own name, and in his own country, though something scarcely to be defined, but equivocal and provocative of suspicion, made him displeasing to the prudent, and vaguely alarmed the experience of the sober,—still no positive accusation was attached to the general integrity of his character; and the mere dissipation of his habits was naturally little known out of his familiar circle. Hence, he had the most presumptuous confidence in himself—a confidence native to his courage, and confirmed by his experience. His conscience was so utterly obtuse, that he might almost be said to present the phenomenon of a man without conscience at all. Unlike Conrad, he did not "know himself a villain;" all that he knew of himself was, that he was a remarkably clever fellow, without prejudice or superstition. That, with all his gifts, he had not succeeded better in life, he ascribed carelessly to the surpassing wisdom of his philosophy. He could have done better if he had enjoyed himself less; but was not enjoyment the be all and end all of this little life? More often, indeed, in the moods of his bitter envy, he would lay the fault upon the world. How great he could have been, if he had been rich and high-born! Oh, he was made to spend, not to save—to command, not to fawn! He was not formed to plod through the dull mediocrities of fortune; he must toss up for the All or the Nothing! It was no control over himself that made Varney now turn his thoughts from certain grave designs on Percival St. John, to the brutal debauchery of his three companions,—rather, he then yielded most to his natural self. And when the morning star rose over the night he passed with low profligates

and venal nymphs,—when, over the fragments on the board and emptied bottles, and drunken riot, dawn gleamed and saw him in all the pride of his magnificent organisation, and the cynicism of his measured vice,—fair, fresh, and blooming, amidst those maudlin eyes, and flushed cheeks, and reeling figures,—laughing hideously over the spectacle he had provoked, and kicking aside, with a devil's scorn, the prostrate form of the favoured partner whose head had rested on his bosom, as alone, with a steady step, he passed the threshold, and walked into the fresh healthful air—Gabriel Varney enjoyed the fell triumph of his hell-born vanity, and revelled in his sentiment of superiority and power.

Meanwhile, on quitting Varney, young Percival strolled on as the whim directed him. Turning down the Haymarket he gained the colonnade of the Opera House. The crowd there was so dense that his footsteps were arrested, and he leant against one of the columns in admiration of the various galaxies in view. In front blazed the rival stars of the United Service Club and the Athenæum,—to the left, the quaint and peculiar device which lighted up Northumberland House,—to the right, the anchors, cannons, and bombs which typified ingeniously the martial attributes of the Ordnance Office.

At that moment there were three persons connected with this narrative within a few feet of each other, distinguished from the multitude by the feelings with which each regarded the scene, and felt the jostle of the crowd. Percival St. John, in whom the harmless sense of pleasure was yet vivid and unsatiated, caught from the assemblage only that physical hilarity which heightened his own spirits. If in a character as yet so undeveloped, to which the large passions and stern ends of life were as yet unknown, stirred some deeper and more musing thoughts and speculations, giving gravity to the habitual smile on his rosy lip, and steadying the play of his sparkling eyes, he would have been at a loss himself to explain the dim sentiment and the vague desire.

Screened by another column from the pressure of the mob, with his arms folded on his breast, a man some few years older in point of time—many years older in point of character

—gazed (with thoughts how turbulent—with ambition how profound!) upon the dense and dark masses that covered space and street far as the eye could reach. He, indeed, could not have said, with Varney, that he was "at home in a crowd." For a crowd did not fill him with the sense of his own individual being and importance, but grappled him to its mighty breast with the thousand tissues of a common destiny. Who shall explain and disentangle those high, and restless, and interwoven emotions with which intellectual ambition, honourable and ardent, gazes upon that solemn thing with which, in which, for which it lives and labours—the Human Multitude? To that abstracted, solitary man, the illumination, the festivity, the curiosity, the holiday, were nothing, or but as fleeting phantoms and vain seemings. In his heart's eye, he saw before him but the PEOPLE, the shadow of an everlasting audience—audience at once and judge.

And literally touching him as he stood, the ragged sweeper, who had returned in vain to devote a last care to his beloved charge, stood arrested with the rest, gazing joylessly on the blazing lamps, dead as the stones he heeded, to the young vivacity of the one man, the solemn visions of the other. So, O London, amidst the universal holiday to monarch and to mob, in those three souls lived the three elements, which duly mingled and administered, make thy vice and thy virtue —thy glory and thy shame—thy labour and thy luxury; pervading the palace and the street—the hospital and the prison;—enjoyment, which is pleasure—energy, which is action —torpor, which is want!

CHAPTER II.

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT.

SUDDENLY across the gaze of Percival St. John there flashed a face that woke him from his abstraction, as a light awakes the sleeper. It was as a recognition of something seen dimly before—a truth coming out from a dream.

It was not the mere beauty of that face (and beautiful it was) that arrested his eye and made his heart beat more quickly—it was rather that nameless and inexplicable sympathy which constitutes love at first sight;—a sort of impulse and instinct common to the dullest as the quickest—the hardest reason as the liveliest fancy. Plain Cobbett, seeing before the cottage-door, at her homeliest of house-work, the girl of whom he said—"That girl should be my wife;" and Dante, first thrilled by the vision of Beatrice, are alike true types of a common experience. Whatever of love sinks the deepest is felt at first sight; it streams on us abrupt from the cloud, a lightning flash—a destiny revealed to us face to face.

Now, there was nothing poetical in the place or the circumstance, still less in the companionship in which this fair creature startled the virgin heart of that careless boy; she was leaning on the arm of a stout, rosy-faced matron in a puce-coloured gown, who was flanked on the other side by a very small, very spare man, with a very wee face, the lower part of which was enveloped in an immense belcher. Besides these two incumbrances, the stout lady contrived to carry in her hands an umbrella, a basket, and a pair of pattens.

In the midst of the strange, unfamiliar emotion which his eye conveyed to his heart, Percival's ear was displeasingly jarred by the loud, bluff, hearty voice of the girl's female companion—

"Gracious me! if that is not John Ardworth; who'd have thought it! Why, John—I say, John!" and lifting her umbrella horizontally, she poked aside two city clerks in front of her, wheeled round the little man on her left, upon whom the clerks simultaneously bestowed the appellation of "feller," and driving him, as being the sharpest and thinnest wedge at hand, through a dense knot of some half a dozen gapers, while following his involuntary progress she looked defiance on the malcontents, she succeeded in clearing her way to the spot where stood the young man she had discovered. The ambitious dreamer, for it was he, thus detected and disturbed, looked embarrassed for a moment, as the stout lady, touching him with the umbrella, said,

"Well, I declare, if this is not too bad! You sent word that

you should not be able to come out with us to see the 'luminations, and here you are as large as life!"

"I did not think at the moment you wrote to me, that——"

"Oh, stuff!" interrupted the stout woman, with a significant, good-humoured shake of her head, "I know what's what; tell the truth and shame the gentleman who objects to showing his feet. You are a wild fellow, John Ardworth—you are! you like looking after the pretty faces—you do—you do—ha, ha, ha! very natural! So did you once—did not you, Mr. Mivers—did not you, eh? men must be men—they always are men, and its my belief that 'men they always *will* be!"

With this sage conjecture into the future, the lady turned to Mr. Mivers, who thus appealed to, extricated with some difficulty his chin from the folds of his belcher, and putting up his small face, said, in a small voice, "Yes, I was a wild fellow once, but you have tamed me! you have, Mrs. M."

And therewith the chin sank again into the belcher, and the small voice died into a small sigh.

The stout lady glanced benignly at her spouse, and then resuming her address, to which Ardworth listened with a half-frown and a half-smile, observed encouragingly—

"Yes, there's nothing like a lawful wife to break a man in, as you will find some day. Howsomever, your time's not come for the altar, so suppose you give Helen your arm, and come with us."

"Do," said Helen, in a sweet, coaxing voice.

Ardworth bent down his rough, earnest face to Helen's, and an evident pleasure relaxed its thoughtful lines. "I cannot resist you," he began, and then he paused and frowned. "Pish," he added, "I was talking folly; but what head would not you turn? Resist you I must, for I am on my way now to my drudgery. Ask me anything some years hence, when I have time to be happy, and then see if I am the bear you now call me."

"Well," said Mrs. Mivers, emphatically, "are you coming, or are you not? Don't stand there shilly-shally."

"Mrs. Mivers," returned Ardworth with a kind of sly humour, "I am sure you would be very angry with your husband's

excellent shopmen, if that was the way they spoke to your customers. If some unhappy dropper-in—some lady who came to buy a yard or so of Irish, was suddenly dazzled, as I am by a luxury wholly unforeseen and eagerly coveted—a splendid lace veil, or a ravishing cashmere, or whatever else you ladies desiderate, and while she was balancing between prudence and temptation, your foreman exclaimed—'Don't stand shilly-shally,' —come, I put it to you."

"Stuff!" said Mrs. Mivers.

"Alas! unlike your imaginary customer (I hope so, at least, for the sake of your till), prudence gets the better of me; unless," added Ardworth, irresolutely, and glancing at Helen —"unless, indeed, you are not sufficiently protected, and——"

"Purtected!" exclaimed Mrs. Mivers, in an indignant tone of astonishment, and agitating the formidable umbrella, "as if I was not enough, with the help of this here domestic commodity, to purtect a dozen such. Purtected, indeed!"

"John is right, Mrs. M.; business is business," said Mr. Mivers. "Let us move on—we stop the way, and those idle lads are listening to us, and sniggering."

"Sniggering!" exclaimed the gentle helpmate; "I should like to see those who presume for to snigger;" and as she spoke she threw a look of defiance around her. Then, having thus satisfied her resentment, she prepared to obey, as no doubt she always did, her lord and master. Suddenly, with a practised movement, she wheeled round Mr. Mivers, and taking care to protrude before him the sharp point of the umbrella, cut her way through the crowd like the scythed car of the ancient Britons, and was soon lost amidst the throng, although her way might be guessed by a slight ripple of peculiar agitation along the general stream, accompanied by a prolonged murmur of reproach or expostulation which gradually died in the distance.

Ardworth gazed after the fair form of Helen with a look of regret; and, when it vanished,—with a slight start and a suppressed sigh, he turned away, and with the long, steady stride of a strong man, cleared his path through the Strand, towards the printing-office of a journal on which he was responsibly engaged.

But Percival, who had caught much of the conversation that took place so near him—Percival, happy child of idleness and whim, had no motive of labour and occupation to stay the free impulse of his heart, and his heart drew him on, with magnetic attraction, in the track of the first being that had ever touched the sweet instincts of youth.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Mivers was destined to learn—though, perhaps, the lesson little availed her—that to get smoothly through this world it is necessary to be supple as well as strong; and though, up to a certain point, man or woman may force the way by poking umbrellas into people's ribs, and treading mercilessly upon people's toes, yet the endurance of ribs and toes has its appointed limits.

Helen, half terrified, also half amused by her companion's robust resolution of purpose, had in Mrs. Mivers's general courage and success that confidence which the weak repose in the strong; and though, whenever she turned her eyes from the illuminations, she besought Mrs. Mivers to be more gentle, yet, seeing that they had gone safely from St. Paul's to St. James's, she had no distinct apprehension of any practically ill results from the energies she was unable to mitigate. But now, having just gained the end of St. James's Street, Mrs. Mivers at last found her match. The crowd here halted, thick and serried, to gaze in peace upon the brilliant vista which the shops and clubs of that street presented. Coaches and carriages had paused in their line, and immediately before Mrs. Mivers stood three very thin small women, whose dress bespoke them to be of the humblest class.

"Make way, there—make way, my good women, make way!" cried Mrs. Mivers, equally disdainful of the size and the rank of the obstructing parties.

"Arrah, and what shall we make way for the like of you, you old busybody?" said one of the dames, turning round, and presenting a very formidable squint to the broad optics of Mrs. Mivers.

Without deigning a reply, Mrs. Mivers had recourse to her usual tactics. Umbrella and husband went right between two of the feminine obstructives; and to the inconceivable astonish-

ment and horror of the assailant, husband and umbrella instantly vanished. The three small furies had pounced upon both. They were torn from their natural owner—they were hurried away; the stream behind, long fretted at the path so abruptly made amidst it, closed in, joyous with a thousand waves. Mrs. Mivers and Helen were borne forward in one way, the umbrella and the husband in the other: in the distance a small voice was heard—"Don't you!—don't! Be quiet! Mrs.—Mrs. M.! Oh! oh! Mrs. M.!" At that last repetition of the beloved and familiar initial, uttered in a tone of almost superhuman anguish, the conjugal heart of Mrs. Mivers was afflicted beyond control.

"Wait here a moment, my dear, I'll just give it them—that's all!" And in another moment Mrs. Mivers was heard bustling, scolding, till all trace of her whereabout was gone from the eyes of Helen. Thus left alone, in exceeding shame and dismay, the poor girl cast a glance around. The glance was caught by two young men, whose station, in these days when dress is an equivocal designator of rank, could not be guessed by their exterior. They might be dandies from the west—they might be clerks from the east.

"By Jove," exclaimed one, "that's a sweet pretty girl!" and, by a sudden movement of the crowd, they both found themselves close to Helen.

"Are you alone, my dear?" said a voice rudely familiar.

Helen made no reply—the tone of the voice frightened her. A gap in the mob showed the space towards Cleveland Row, which, leading to no illuminations, was vacant and solitary. She instantly made towards this spot; the two men followed her,—the bolder and elder one occasionally trying to catch hold of her arm. At last, as she passed the last house to the left, a house then owned by one who, at once far-sighted and impetuous, affable and haughty—characterised alike by solid virtues and brilliant faults—would, but for hollow friends, have triumphed over countless foes, and enjoyed at last that brief day of stormy power, for which statesmen resign the health of manhood and the hope of age—as she passed that memorable mansion, she suddenly perceived that the space

before her had no thoroughfare, and, while she paused in dismay, her pursuers blockaded her escape.

One of them now fairly seized her hand: "Nay, pretty one, why so cruel? But one kiss—only one!" He endeavoured to pass his arm round her waist while he spoke. Helen eluded him, and darted forward, to find her way stopped by her persecutor's companion, when, to her astonishment, a third person gently pushed aside the form that impeded her path, approached, and looking mute defiance at the unchivalric molesters, offered her his arm. Helen gave but one timid, hurrying glance to her unexpected protector: something in his face, his air, his youth, appealed at once to her confidence. Mechanically, and scarce knowing what she did, she laid her trembling hand on the arm held out to her.

The two Lotharios looked foolish. One pulled up his shirt-collar, and the other turned, with a forced laugh, on his heel. Boy as Percival seemed, and little more than boy as he was, there was a dangerous fire in his eye, and an expression of spirit and ready courage in his whole countenance, which, if it did not awe his tall rivals, made them, at least unwilling to have a scene, and provoke the interference of a policeman, one of whom was now seen walking slowly up to the spot. They therefore preserved a discomfited silence; and Percival St. John, with his heart going ten knots a beat, sailed triumphantly off with his prize.

Scarcely knowing whither he went, certainly forgetful of Mr. Mivers, in his anxiety to escape at least from the crowd, Percival walked on till he found himself with his fair charge under the trees of St. James's Park.

Then Helen, recovering herself, paused, and said, alarmed, "But this is not my way—I must go back to the street!"

"How foolish I am—that is true!" said Percival, looking confused. "I—I felt so happy to be with you, feel your hand on my arm, and think that we were all by ourselves, that—that—but you have dropped your flowers!"

And as a bouquet Helen wore, dislodged somehow or other, fell to the ground, both stooped to pick it up, and their hands met. At that touch, Percival felt a strange tremble, which

perhaps communicated itself (for such things are contagious) to his fair companion. Percival had got the nosegay, and seemed willing to detain it, for he bent his face lingeringly over the flowers. At length, he turned his bright ingenuous eyes to Helen, and singling one rose from the rest, said, beseechingly—"May I keep this? See, it is not so fresh as the others."

"I am sure, sir," said Helen, colouring, and looking down, "I owe you so much, that I should be glad if a poor flower could repay it."

"A poor flower! You don't know what a prize this is to me!"

Percival placed the rose reverently in his bosom, and the two moved back slowly, as if reluctant both, through the old palace-court into the street.

"Is that lady related to you?" asked Percival, looking another way, and dreading the reply; "not your mother, surely!"

"Oh, no!—I have no mother!"

"Forgive me!" said Percival, for the tone of Helen's voice told him that he had touched the spring of a household sorrow. "And," he added, with a jealousy that he could scarcely restrain from making itself evident in his accent, "that gentleman who spoke to you under the Colonnade—I have seen him before, but where I cannot remember. In fact, you have put everything but yourself out of my head. Is he related to you?"

"He is my cousin."

"Cousin!" repeated Percival, pouting a little; and again there was silence.

"I don't know how it is," said Percival, at last, and very gravely, as if much perplexed by some abstruse thought, "but I feel as if I had known you all my life. I never felt this for any one before."

There was something so irresistibly innocent in the boy's serious, wondering tone, as he said these words, that a smile, in spite of herself, broke out amongst the thousand dimples round Helen's charming lips. Perhaps the little witch felt a touch of coquetry for the first time.

Percival, who was looking sidelong into her face, saw the smile, and said, drawing up his head, and shaking back his jetty curls, "I dare say you are laughing at me as a mere boy; but I am older than I look. I am sure I am much older than you are. Let me see, you are seventeen, I suppose?"

Helen, getting more and more at her ease, nodded playful assent.

"And I am not far from twenty-one. Ah! you may well look surprised—but so it is. An hour ago I felt a mere boy; now I shall never feel a boy again!"

Once more there was a long pause, and before it was broken they had gained the very spot in which Helen had lost her friend.

"Why, bless us, and save us!" exclaimed a voice, 'loud as a trumpet,' but not 'with a silver sound,' "there you are, after all;" and Mrs. Mivers (husband and umbrella both regained) planted herself full before them.

"Oh, a pretty fright I have been in; and now to see you coming along as cool as if nothing had happened—as if the humbrella had not lost its hivory 'andle—it's quite purvoking. Dear, dear! what we have gone through! And who is this young gentleman, pray?"

Helen whispered some hesitating explanation, which Mrs. Mivers did not seem to receive as graciously as Percival, poor fellow, had a right to expect. She stared him full in the face, and shook her head suspiciously when she saw him a little confused by the survey. Then, tucking Helen tightly under her arm, she walked back towards the Haymarket, merely saying to Percival—

"Much obligated, and good night. I have a long journey to take to set down this here young lady, and the best thing we can all do is to get home as fast as we can, and have a refreshing cup of tea—that's my mind, sir. Excuse *me!*"

Thus abruptly dismissed, poor Percival gazed wistfully on his Helen, as she was borne along, and was somewhat comforted at seeing her look back, with (as he thought) a touch of regret in her parting smile. Then suddenly it flashed across him how sadly he had wasted his time. Novice that he was, he had not

even learned the name and address of his new acquaintance. At that thought he hurried on through the crowd, but only reached the object of his pursuit just in time to see her placed in a coach, and to catch a full view of the luxuriant proportions of Mrs. Mivers as she followed her into the vehicle.

As the lumbering conveyance (the only coach on the stand) heaved itself into motion, Percival's eye fell on the sweeper, who was still leaning on his broom, and who, in grateful recognition of the unwonted generosity that had repaid his service, touched his ragged hat, and smiled drowsily on his young customer. Love sharpens the wit, and animates the timid;—a thought, worthy of the most experienced, inspired Percival St. John: he hurried to the sweeper, laid his hand on his patchwork coat, and said, breathlessly—

"You see that coach turning into the square; follow it—find out where it sets down. There's a sovereign for you—another if you succeed. Call and tell me your success. Number —— Curzon Street!—off, like a shot!"

The sweeper nodded and grinned: it was possibly not his first commission of a similar kind. He darted down the street; and Percival, following him with equal speed, had the satisfaction to see him, as the coach traversed St. James's Square, comfortably seated on the footboard.

Beck, dull clod, knew nothing, cared nothing, felt nothing as to the motives or purpose of his employer. Honest love or selfish vice, it was the same to him. He saw only the one sovereign which, with astounded eyes, he still gazed at on his palm, and the vision of the sovereign that was yet to come:—

"Scandit æratas vitiosa naves
Cura: nec turmas equitum relinquit."

It was the Selfishness of London—calm and stolid, whether on the track of innocence or at the command of guile.

At half-past ten o'clock, Percival St. John was seated in his room, and the sweeper stood at the threshold. Wealth and penury seemed brought into visible contact in the persons of the visitor and the host. The dwelling is held by some to give an index to the character of the owner: if so, Percival's apartments differed much from those generally favoured by

young men of rank and fortune. On the one hand it had none of that affectation of superior taste, evinced in *marqueterie* and gilding, or the more picturesque discomfort of high-backed chairs and mediæval curiosities which prevails in the daintier abodes of fastidious bachelors. Nor, on the other hand, had it the sporting character which individualises the ruder juveniles "*qui gaudent equis*," betrayed by engravings of racers, and celebrated fox-hunts, relieved, perhaps, if the Nimrod condescend to a cross of the Lovelace, with portraits of *figurantes*, and ideals of French sentiment, entitled, "*Le Soir*," or "*La Reveillée*," "*L'Espoir*," or "*L'Abandon*." But the rooms had a physiognomy of their own, from their exquisite neatness and cheerful simplicity. The chintz draperies were lively with gay flowers; books filled up the niches; here and there were small pictures, chiefly sea-pieces—well chosen, well placed.

There might, indeed, have been something almost effeminate in a certain inexpressible purity of taste, and a cleanliness of detail that seemed actually brilliant, had not the folding-doors allowed a glimpse of a plainer apartment, with fencing-foils and boxing-gloves ranged on the wall, and a cricket-bat resting carelessly in the corner. These gave a redeeming air of manliness to the rooms, but it was the manliness of a boy; half-girl, if you please, in the purity of thought that pervaded one room, all boy in the playful pursuits that were made manifest in the other. Simple, however, as this abode really was, poor Beck had never been admitted to the sight of anything half so fine. He stood at the door for a moment, and stared about him, bewildered and dazzled. But his natural torpor to things that concerned him not, soon brought to him the same stoicism that philosophy gives the strong; and after the first surprise, his eye quietly settled on his employer. St. John rose eagerly from the sofa, on which he had been contemplating the starlit tree-tops of Chesterfield Gardens—

"Well, well?" said Percival.

"Hold Brompton," said Beck, with a brevity of word and clearness of perception worthy a Spartan.

"Old Brompton?" repeated Percival, thinking the reply the most natural in the world.

"In a big 'ous by hisself," continued Beck, "with a 'igh vall in front."

"You would know it again?"

"In course; he's so wery peculiar."

"He? who?"

"Vy, the 'ous. The young lady got out, and the hold folks driv back. I did not go arter *them!*" and Beck looked sly.

"So;—I must find out the name."

"I axed at the public," said Beck, proud of his diplomacy. "They keeps a sarvant vot takes half a pint at her meals. The young lady's ma be a foriner."

"A foreigner! Then she lives there with her mother?"

"So they 'spose at the public."

"And the name?"

Beck shook his head. "'Tis a French 'un, your onor; but the sarvant's is Martha."

"You must meet me at Brompton, near the turnpike, to-morrow, and show me the house."

"Vy, I's in bizness all day, please your onor."

"In business?"

"I's the place of the crossing," said Beck, with much dignity; "but arter eight I goes vhere I likes."

"To-morrow evening, then, at half-past eight, by the turnpike."

Beck pulled his forelock assentingly.

"There's the sovereign I promised you, my poor fellow—much good may it do you. Perhaps you have some father or mother whose heart it will glad."

"I never had no such thing," replied Beck, turning the coin in his hand.

"Well, don't spend it in drink."

"I never drinks nothing but svipes."

"Then," said Percival, laughingly, "what, my good friend, will you ever do with your money?"

Beck put his finger to his nose, sunk his voice into a whisper, and replied, solemnly—"I 'as a mattris."

"A mistress," said Percival; "oh, a sweetheart! Well; but if she's a good girl, and loves you, she'll not let you spend your money on her."

"I hain't such a ninny as that," said Beck, with majestic contempt. "I 'spises the flat that is done brown by the blowens. I 'as a mattris."

"A mattress! a mattress! Well, what has that to do with the money?"

"Vy, I lines it."

Percival looked puzzled. "Oh," said he, after a thoughtful pause, and in a tone of considerable compassion, "I understand; you sew your money in your mattress. My poor, poor lad, you can do better than that!—there are the savings banks."

Beck looked frightened: "I 'opes your onor von't tell no vun. I 'opes no vun von't go for to put my tin vere I shall know nothing vatsomever about it. Now, I knows vere it is—and I lays on it."

"Do you sleep more soundly when you lie on your treasure?"

"No; it's hodd," said Beck, musingly, "but the more I lines it the vorse I sleeps."

Percival laughed; but there was melancholy in his laughter; something in the forlorn, benighted, fatherless, squalid miser went to the core of his open, generous heart.

"Do you ever read your Bible?" said he, after a pause; "or even the newspaper?"

"I does not read nothing; cos vy? I hain't been made a schollard, like swell Tim, as was lagged for a forgery."

"You go to church on a Sunday?"

"Yes; I 'as a weekly hingagement at the New Road."

"What do you mean?"

"To see arter the gig of a gemman vot comes from 'Igate."

Percival lifted his brilliant eyes, and they were moistened with a heavenly dew, on the dull face of his fellow-creature. Beck made a scrape, looked round, shambled back to the door, and ran home, through the lamp-lit streets of the great mart of the Christian universe, to sew the gold in his mattress.

CHAPTER III.

EARLY TRAINING FOR AN UPRIGHT GENTLEMAN.

PERCIVAL ST. JOHN had been brought up at home under the eye of his mother and the care of an excellent man, who had been tutor to himself and his brothers. The tutor was not much of a classical scholar, for, in great measure, he had educated himself: and he who does so usually lacks the polish and brilliancy of one whose footsteps have been led early to the Temple of the Muses. In fact, Captain Greville was a gallant soldier, with whom Vernon St. John had been acquainted in his own brief military career, and whom circumstances had so reduced in life as to compel him to sell his commission, and live as he could. He had always been known in his regiment as a reading man, and his authority looked up to in all the disputes as to history and dates, and literary anecdotes, which might occur at the mess-table. Vernon considered him the most learned man of his acquaintance; and, when accidentally meeting him in London, he learned his fallen fortunes, he congratulated himself on a very brilliant idea, when he suggested that Captain Greville should assist him in the education of his boys and the management of his estate. At first, all that Greville modestly undertook, with respect to the former, and, indeed, was expected to do, was to prepare the young gentlemen for Eton, to which Vernon, with the natural predilection of an Eton man, destined his sons. But the sickly constitutions of the two elder justified Lady Mary in her opposition to a public school; and Percival conceived early so strong an affection for a sailor's life, that the father's intentions were frustrated. The two elder continued their education at home; and Percival, at an earlier age than usual, went to sea. The last was fortunate enough to have for his captain one of that new race of naval officers who, well educated and accomplished, form a notable contrast to the old heroes of Smollett. Percival, however, had not been long in the service before the deaths of his two elder

brothers, preceded by that of his father, made him the head of his ancient house, and the sole prop of his mother's earthly hopes. He conquered with a generous effort the passion for his noble profession, which service had but confirmed, and returned home with his fresh, childlike nature uncorrupted, his constitution strengthened, his lively and impressionable mind braced by the experience of danger and the habits of duty, and quietly resumed his reading under Captain Greville, who moved from the Hall to a small house in the village.

Now, the education he had received, from first to last, was less adapted prematurely to quicken his intellect and excite his imagination than to warm his heart and elevate, while it chastened, his moral qualities; for in Lady Mary there was, amidst singular sweetness of temper, a high cast of character and thought. She was not what is commonly called clever, and her experience of the world was limited, compared to that of most women of similar rank who pass their lives in the vast theatre of London. But she became superior by a certain single-heartedness which made truth so habitual to her, that the light in which she lived rendered all objects around her clear. One who is always true in the great duties of life is nearly always wise. And Vernon, when he had fairly buried his faults, had felt a noble shame for the excesses into which they had led him. Gradually more and more wedded to his home, he dropped his old companions. He set grave guard on his talk (his *habits* now required no guard), lest any of the ancient levity should taint the ears of his children. Nothing is more common in parents than their desire that their children should escape their faults. We scarcely know ourselves till we have children, and then, if we love them duly, we look narrowly into failings that become vices, when they serve as examples to the young.

The inborn gentleman with the native courage, and spirit, and horror of trick and falsehood which belong to that chivalrous abstraction, survived almost alone in Vernon St. John; and his boys sprang up in the atmosphere of generous sentiments and transparent truth. The tutor was in harmony with the parents —a soldier every inch of him—not a mere disciplinarian, yet

with a profound sense of duty and a knowledge that duty is to be found in attention to details. In inculcating the habit of subordination so graceful to the young, he knew how to make himself beloved, and what is harder still, to be understood. The soul of this poor soldier was white and unstained, as the arms of a maiden knight; it was full of suppressed, but lofty enthusiasm. He had been ill used, whether by Fate or the Horse Guards—his career had been a failure, but he was as loyal as if his hand held the field-marshal's truncheon and the garter bound his knee. He was above all querulous discontent. From him, no less than from his parents, Percival caught not only a spirit of honour worthy the *antiqua fides* of the poets, but that peculiar cleanliness of thought, if the expression may be used, which belongs to the ideal of youthful chivalry. In mere book-learning, Percival, as may be supposed, was not very extensively read; but his mind, if not largely stored, had a certain unity of culture which gave it stability and individualised its operations. Travels, voyages, narratives of heroic adventure, biographies of great men, had made the favourite pasture of his enthusiasm. To this was added the more stirring, and, perhaps, the more genuine order of poets who make you feel and glow, rather than doubt and ponder. He knew, at least, enough of Greek to enjoy old Homer; and if he could have come but ill through a college examination into Æschylus and Sophocles, he had dwelt with fresh delight on the rushing storm of spears in the *Seven before Thebes*, and wept over the heroic calamities of Antigone. In science, he was no adept; but his clear good sense, and quick appreciation of positive truths, had led him easily through the elementary mathematics, and his somewhat martial spirit had made him delight in the old captain's lectures on military tactics. Had he remained in the navy, Percival St. John would, doubtless, have been distinguished. His talents fitted him for straightforward manly action; and he had a generous desire of distinction, vague, perhaps, the moment he was taken from his profession, and curbed by his diffidence in himself and his sense of deficiencies in the ordinary routine of purely classical education. Still he had in him all the elements of

a true man—a man to go through life with a firm step and a clear conscience, and a gallant hope. Such a man may not win fame, *that* is an accident; but he must occupy no despicable place in the movement of the world.

It was at first intended to send Percival to Oxford, but for some reason or other, that design was abandoned. Perhaps Lady Mary, over-cautious, as mothers left alone sometimes are,—feared the contagion to which a young man of brilliant expectations, and no studious turn, is necessarily exposed in all places of miscellaneous resort. So Percival was sent abroad for two years, under the guardianship of Captain Greville. On his return, at the age of nineteen—the great world lay before him, and he longed ardently to enter. For a year Lady Mary's fears and fond anxieties detained him at Laughton; but, though his great tenderness for his mother withheld Percival from opposing her wishes by his own, this interval of inaction affected visibly his health and spirits. Captain Greville, a man of the world, saw the cause sooner than Lady Mary, and one morning, earlier than usual, he walked up to the Hall.

The captain, with all his deference to the sex, was a plain man enough, when business was to be done. Like his great commander, he came to the point in a few words.

"My dear Lady Mary, our boy must go to London—we are killing him here."

"Mr. Greville!" cried Lady Mary, turning pale and putting aside her embroidery—"killing him?"

"Killing the man in him. I don't mean to alarm you—I dare say his lungs are sound enough, and that his heart would bear the stethoscope to the satisfaction of the College of Surgeons. But, my dear ma'am, Percival is to be a man—it is the man you are killing by keeping him tied to your apron string."

"Oh, Mr. Greville! I am sure you don't wish to wound me, but——"

"I beg ten thousand pardons. I am rough, but truth is rough sometimes."

"It is not for my sake," said the mother, warmly, and with

tears in her eyes, "that I have wished him to be here. If he is dull, can we not fill the house for him?"

"Fill a thimble, my dear Lady Mary—Percival should have a plunge in the ocean."

"But he is so young yet, that horrid London!—such temptations—fatherless, too!"

"I have no fear of the result if Percival goes now while his principles are strong, and his imagination not inflamed; but if we keep him here much longer against his bent, he will learn to brood and to muse, write bad poetry perhaps, and think the world withheld from him a thousand times more delightful than it is. This very dread of temptation will provoke his curiosity, irritate his fancy, make him imagine the temptation must be a very delightful thing. For the first time in my life, ma'am, I have caught him sighing over fashionable novels, and subscribing to the Southampton Circulating Library. Take my word for it, it is time that Percival should begin life, and swim without corks."

Lady Mary had a profound confidence in Greville's judgment and affection for Percival, and, like a sensible woman, she was aware of her own weakness. She remained silent for a few moments, and then said, with an effort—

"You know how hateful London is to me now—how unfit I am to return to the hollow forms of its society; still if you think it right, I will take a house for the season, and Percival can still be under our eye."

"No, ma'am, pardon me, that will be the surest way to make him either discontented or hypocritical. A young man of his prospects and temper can hardly be expected to chime in with all our sober, old-fashioned habits. You will impose on him—if he is to conform to our hours, and notions, and quiet set—a thousand irksome restraints; and what will be the consequence? In a year, he will be of age, and can throw us off altogether, if he pleases. I know the boy:—don't seem to distrust him—he may be trusted. You place the true restraint on temptation, when you say to him, 'We confide to you our dearest treasure—your honour, your morals, your conscience, yourself!'"

"But, at least, you will go with him, if it must be so," said

Lady Mary, after a few timid arguments, from which, one by one, she was driven.

"I!—what for?—to be a jest of the young puppies he must know—to make him ashamed of himself and me—himself as a milksop, and me as a dry nurse."

"But this was not so abroad!"

"Abroad, ma'am, I gave him full swing. I promise you; and when we went abroad he was two years younger."

"But he is a mere child still."

"Child, Lady Mary! At his age, I had gone through two sieges. There are younger faces than his at a mess-room. Come, come! I know what you fear—he may commit some follies; very likely. He may be taken in, and lose some money—he can afford it, and he will get experience in return. Vices he has none. I have seen him—ay, with the vicious. Send him out against the world like a saint of old, with his Bible in his hand, and no spot on his robe. Let him see fairly what is, not stay here to dream of what is not. And when he's of age, ma'am, we must get him an object—a pursuit;—start him for the county, and make him serve the state; he will understand that business pretty well. Tush! tush! what is there to cry at?"

The Captain prevailed. We don't say that his advice would have been equally judicious for all youths of Percival's age; but he knew well the nature to which he confided; he knew well how strong was that young heart in its healthful simplicity and instinctive rectitude; and he appreciated his manliness not too highly when he felt that all evident props and aids would be but irritating tokens of distrust.

And thus, armed only with letters of introduction, his mother's tearful admonitions, and Greville's experienced warnings, Percival St. John was launched into London life. After the first month or so, Greville came up to visit him, do him sundry kind invisible offices amongst his old friends, help him to equip his apartments, and mount his stud: and, wholly satisfied with the result of his experiment, returned in high spirits with flattering reports to the anxious mother.

But, indeed, the tone of Percival's letters would have been sufficient to allay even maternal anxiety. He did not write, as

sons are apt to do, short excuses for not writing more at length, unsatisfactory compressions of details (exciting worlds of conjecture) into a hurried sentence. Frank and overflowing, those delightful epistles gave accounts fresh from the first impressions of all he saw and did. There was a racy, wholesome gusto in his enjoyment of novelty and independence. His balls and his dinners, and his cricket at Lord's—his partners and his companions; his general gaiety, his occasional *ennui*, furnished ample materials to one who felt he was corresponding with another heart, and had nothing to fear or to conceal.

But about two months before this portion of our narrative opens with the Coronation, Lady Mary's favourite sister, who had never married, and who, by the death of her parents, was left alone in the worse than widowhood of an old maid, had been ordered to Pisa, for a complaint that betrayed pulmonary symptoms; and Lady Mary, with her usual unselfishness, conquered both her aversion to movement and her wish to be in reach of her son, to accompany abroad this beloved and solitary relative. Captain Greville was pressed into service as their joint cavalier. And thus Percival's habitual intercourse with his two principal correspondents received a temporary check.

CHAPTER IV.

JOHN ARDWORTH.

AT noon the next day, Beck, restored to his grandeur, was at the helm of his state; Percival was vainly trying to be amused by the talk of two or three loungers who did him the honour to smoke a cigar in his rooms; and John Ardworth sat in his dingy cell in Gray's Inn, with a pile of law books on the table, and the daily newspapers carpeting a footstool of Hansard's *Debates* upon the floor—no unusual combination of studies amongst the poorer and more ardent students of the law, who often owe their earliest, nor perhaps their least noble earnings, to employment in the empire of the Press. By the power of a mind habituated to

labour, and backed by a frame of remarkable strength and endurance, Ardworth grappled with his arid studies not the less manfully for a night mainly spent in a printer's office, and stinted to less than four hours' actual sleep. But that sleep was profound and refreshing as a peasant's. The nights thus devoted to the Press (he was employed in the subediting of a daily journal), the mornings to the law, he kept distinct the two separate callings with a stern subdivision of labour, which in itself proved the vigour of his energy and the resolution of his will. Early compelled to shift for himself, and carve out his own way, he had obtained a small fellowship at the small college in which he had passed his academic career. Previous to his arrival in London, by contributions to political periodicals, and a high reputation at that noble debating society in Cambridge which has trained some of the most eminent of living public men,[1] he had established a name which was immediately useful to him in obtaining employment on the Press. Like most young men of practical ability, he was an eager politician. The popular passion of the day kindled his enthusiasm, and stirred the depths of his soul with magnificent, though exaggerated, hopes in the destiny of his race. He identified himself with the people; his stout heart beat loud in their stormy cause. His compositions, if they wanted that knowledge of men, that subtle comprehension of the true state of parties, that happy *temperance* in which the crowning wisdom of statesmen must consist—qualities which experience alone can give—excited considerable attention by their bold eloquence and hardy logic. They were suited to the time. But John Ardworth had that solidity of understanding which betokens more than talent, and which is the usual substratum of genius. He would not depend alone on the precarious and often unhonoured toils of polemical literature for that distinction on which he had fixed his steadfast heart. Patiently he plodded

[1] Amongst those whom the "Union" almost contemporaneously prepared for public life, and whose distinction has kept the promise of their youth, we may mention the eminent barristers, Messrs. Austin and Cockburn; and amongst statesmen, Lord Grey, Mr. C. Buller, Mr. Charles Villiers, and Mr. Macaulay. Nor ought we to forget those brilliant competitors for the prizes of the University, Dr. Kennedy (now head master of Shrewsbury School), and the late Winthrop M. Praed.

on through the formal drudgeries of his new profession, lighting up dulness by his own acute comprehension, weaving complexities into simple system by the grasp of an intellect inured to generalise; and learning to love even what was most distasteful, by the sense of difficulty overcome, and the clearer vision which every step through the mists, and up the hill, gave of the land beyond. Of what the superficial are apt to consider genius, John Ardworth had but little. He had some imagination (for a true thinker is never without that), but he had a very slight share of fancy. He did not flirt with the Muses; on the granite of his mind few flowers could spring. His style, rushing and earnest, admitted at times of a humour not without delicacy—though less delicate than forcible and deep—but it was little adorned with wit, and still less with poetry. Yet Ardworth had genius, and genius ample and magnificent. There was genius in that industrious energy so patient in the conquest of detail, so triumphant in the perception of results. There was genius in that kindly sympathy with mankind—genius in that stubborn determination to succeed—genius in that vivid comprehension of affairs, and the large interests of the world—genius fed in the labours of the closet, and evinced the instant he was brought into contact with men; evinced in readiness of thought, grasp of memory, even in a rough imperious nature, which showed him born to speak strong truths, and in their name to struggle and command.

Rough was this man often in his exterior, though really gentle and kind-hearted. John Ardworth had sacrificed to no Graces; he would have thrown Lord Chesterfield into a fever. Not that he was ever vulgar, for vulgarity implies affectation of refinement, but he talked loud, and laughed loud if the whim seized him, and rubbed his great hands with a boyish heartiness of glee, if he discomfited an adversary in argument. Or, sometimes he would sit abstracted and moody, and answer briefly and boorishly those who interrupted him. Young men were mostly afraid of him, though he wanted but fame to have a set of admiring disciples. Old men censured his presumption, and recoiled from the novelty of his ideas. Women alone liked and appreciated him, as, with their finer insight into character, they

generally do, what is honest and sterling. Some strange failings, too, had John Ardworth—some of the usual vagaries and contradictions of clever men. As a system, he was rigidly abstemious. For days together he would drink nothing but water, eat nothing but bread, or hard biscuit, or a couple of eggs: then having wound up some allotted portion of work, Ardworth would indulge what he called a self-saturnalia—would stride off with old college friends to an inn in one of the suburbs, and spend, as he said triumphantly, "a day of blessed debauch!" Innocent enough, for the most part, the debauch was;—consisting in cracking jests, stringing puns, a fish dinner, perhaps, and an extra bottle or two of fiery port. Sometimes this jollity, which was always loud and uproarious, found its scene in one of the cider-cellars or midnight taverns, but Ardworth's labours on the Press made that latter dissipation extremely rare. These relaxations were always succeeded by a mien more than usually grave, a manner more than unusually curt and ungracious, an application more than ever rigorous and intense. John Ardworth was not a good-tempered man, but he was the best-natured man that ever breathed. He was like all ambitious persons, very much occupied with self, and yet it would have been a ludicrous misapplication of words to call him selfish. Even the desire of fame which absorbed him was but a part of benevolence—a desire to promote justice and to serve his kind.

John Ardworth's shaggy brows were bent over his open volumes, when his clerk entered noiselessly, and placed on his table a letter which the twopenny-postman had just delivered. With an impatient shrug of the shoulders, Ardworth glanced towards the superscription, but his eye became earnest and his interest aroused as he recognised the hand. "Again!" he muttered, "what mystery is this? Who can feel such interest in my fate?" He broke the seal and read as follows:—

"Do you neglect my advice, or have you begun to act upon it? Are you contented only with the slow process of mechanical application, or will you make a triumphant effort to abridge your apprenticeship, and emerge at once into fame and power? I repeat that you fritter away your talents and your opportunities

upon this miserable task-work on a journal. I am impatient for you. Come forward yourself, put your force and your knowledge into some work of which the world may know the author. Day after day I am examining into your destiny, and day after day I believe more and more that you are not fated for the tedious drudgery to which you doom your youth. I would have you great, but in the senate, not a wretched casuist at the bar. Appear in public as an individual authority, not one of that nameless troop of shadows, contemned while dreaded as, the Press. Write for renown. Go into the world, and make friends. Soften your rugged bearing. Lift yourself above that herd whom you call *the people*. What if you are born of the noble class? What if your career is as gentleman not plebeian? Want not for money. Use what I send you, as the young and the well-born should use it; or let it, at least, gain you a respite from toils for bread—and support you in your struggle to emancipate yourself from obscurity into fame.

"YOUR UNKNOWN FRIEND."

A bank-note for 100*l.* dropped from the envelope, as Ardworth silently replaced the letter on the table.

Thrice before had he received communications in the same handwriting, and much to the same effect. Certainly, to a mind of less strength there would have been something very unsettling in those vague hints of a station higher than he owned—of a future at variance with the toilsome lot he had drawn from the urn; but after a single glance over his lone position in all its bearings, and probable expectations, Ardworth's steady sense shook off the slight disturbance such misty vaticinations had effected. His mother's family was indeed unknown to him—he was even ignorant of her maiden name. But that very obscurity seemed unfavourable to much hope from such a quarter. The connections with the rich and well-born are seldom left obscure. From his father's family he had not one expectation. More had he been moved by exhortations now generally repeated, but in a previous letter more precisely detailed—viz. to appeal to the reading public in his acknowledged person, and by some striking and original work. This idea he had often contemplated

and revolved ; but partly the necessity of keeping pace with the many exigencies of the hour, had deterred him, and partly also the conviction of his sober judgment, that a man does himself no good at the bar, even by the most brilliant distinction gained in discursive fields. He had the natural yearning of the Restless Genius ; and the Patient Genius (higher power of the two) had suppressed the longing. Still, so far, the whispers of his correspondent tempted and aroused. But hitherto he had sought to persuade himself that the communications thus strangely forced on him arose, perhaps, from idle motives—a jest, it might be, of one of his old college friends, or at best the vain enthusiasm of some more credulous admirer. But the inclosure now sent to him, forbade either of these suppositions. Who that he knew could afford so costly a jest, or so extravagant a tribute? He was perplexed, and with his perplexity was mixed a kind of fear. Plain, earnest, unromantic in the common acceptation of the word, the mystery of this intermeddling with his fate, this arrogation of the license to spy, the right to counsel, and the privilege to bestow, gave him the uneasiness the bravest men may feel at noises in the dark. That day he could apply no more—he could not settle back to his Law Reports. He took two or three unquiet turns up and down his smoke-dried cell, then locked up the letter and inclosure, seized his hat, and strode, with his usual lusty swinging strides, into the open air.

But still the letter haunted him. "And if," he said almost audibly, "if I were the heir to some higher station, why then I might have a heart like idle men ; and Helen — beloved Helen!"—he paused, sighed, shook his rough head, shaggy with neglected curls, and added—"As if even then I could steal myself into a girl's good graces! Man's esteem I may command, though poor!—woman's love could I win, though rich? Pooh! pooh! every wood does not make a Mercury; and faith, the wood I am made of will scarcely cut up into a lover."

Nevertheless, though thus soliloquising, Ardworth mechanically bent his way towards Brompton, and halted, half-ashamed of himself, at the house where Helen lodged with her aunt. It was a building that stood apart from all the cottages and villas

of that charming suburb, half-way down a narrow lane, and inclosed by high melancholy walls, deep set in which a small door, with the paint blistered and weather-stained, gave unfrequented entrance to the demesne. A woman servant of middle age, and starched puritanical appearance, answered the loud ring of the bell, and Ardworth seemed a privileged visitor, for she asked him no question, as, with a slight nod, and a smileless, stupid expression in a face otherwise comely, she led the way across a paved path, much weed-grown, to the house. That house itself had somewhat of a stern and sad exterior. It was not ancient, yet it looked old from shabbiness and neglect. The vine, loosened from the rusty nails, trailed rankly against the wall, and fell in crawling branches over the ground. The house had once been whitewashed, but the colour, worn off in great patches, distained with damp, struggled here and there with the dingy chipped bricks beneath. There was no peculiar want of what is called "tenantable repair;" the windows were whole, and doubtless the roof sheltered from the rain. But the woodwork that encased the panes was decayed, and houseleek covered the tiles. Altogether there was that forlorn and cheerless aspect about the place which chills the visitor, he defines not why. And Ardworth steadied his usual careless step, and crept, as if timidly, up the creaking stairs.

On entering the drawing-room—it seemed at first deserted; but the eye, searching round, perceived something stir in the recess of a huge chair—set by the fireless hearth. And from amidst a mass of coverings a pale face emerged, and a thin hand waved its welcome to the visitor.

Ardworth approached, pressed the hand, and drew a seat near to the sufferer's.

"You are better, I hope?" he said cordially,—and yet in a tone of more respect than was often perceptible in his deep, blunt voice.

"I am always the same," was the quiet answer; "come nearer still. Your visits cheer me."

And as these last words were said, Madame Dalibard raised herself from her recumbent posture, and gazed long upon Ardworth's face of power and front of thought. "You over-

fatigue yourself, my poor kinsman," she said, with a certain tenderness: "you look already too old for your young years."

"That's no disadvantage at the bar."

"Is the bar your means or your end?"

"My dear Madame Dalibard, it is my profession."

"No, your profession is to rise. John Ardworth," and the low voice swelled in its volume. "You are bold, able, and aspiring—for this, I love you—love you almost—almost as a mother. Your fate," she continued hurriedly, "interests me; your energies inspire me with admiration. Often I sit here for hours, musing over your destiny to be—so that at times I may almost say that in your life I live."

Ardworth looked embarrassed, and with an awkward attempt at compliment he began, hesitatingly: "I should think too highly of myself, if I could really believe that you——"

"Tell me," interrupted Madame Dalibard: "we have had many conversations upon grave and subtle matters; we have disputed on the secret mysteries of the human mind; we have compared our several experiences of outward life and the mechanism of the social world,—tell me, then, and frankly, what do you think of me? Do you regard me merely as your sex is apt to regard the woman who aspires to equal men—a thing of borrowed phrases and unsound ideas—feeble to guide and unskilled to teach? or do you recognise in this miserable body a mind of force not unworthy yours, ruled by an experience larger than your own?"

"I think of you," answered Ardworth, frankly, "as the most remarkable woman I have ever met. Yet, do not be angry, I do not like to yield to the influence which you gain over me when we meet. It disturbs my convictions—it disquiets my reason—I do not settle back to my life so easily after your breath has passed over it."

"And yet," said Lucretia with a solemn sadness in her voice, "that influence is but the natural power which cold maturity exercises on ardent youth. It is my mournful advantage over you that disquiets your happy calm. It is my experience that unsettles the fallacies which you name 'convictions.' Let this pass I asked your opinion of me, because I wished to place

at your service all that knowledge of life which I possess. In proportion as you esteem me you will accept or reject my counsels."

"I have benefited by them already. It is the tone that you advised me to assume that gave me an importance I had not before with that old formalist whose paper I serve, and whose prejudices I shock; it is to your criticisms that I owe the more practical turn of my writings, and the greater hold they have taken on the public."

"Trifles indeed, these," said Madame Dalibard with a half smile. "Let them at least induce you to listen to me; if I propose to make your path more pleasant, yet your ascent more rapid."

Ardworth knit his brows and his countenance assumed an expression of doubt and curiosity. However, he only replied, with a blunt laugh—

"You must be wise indeed if you have discovered a royal road to distinction!

> "'Ah, who can tell how hard it is to climb
> The steep where Fame's proud temple shines afar!'

A more sensible exclamation than poets usually preface with their whining 'Ah's' and 'Oh's!'"

"What we *are* is nothing," pursued Madame Dalibard; "what we *seem* is much."

Ardworth thrust his hand into his pockets and shook his head. The wise woman continued, unheeding his dissent from her premises.

"Everything you are taught to value has a likeness, and it is that likeness which the world values. Take a man out of the streets, poor and ragged, what will the world do with him? Send him to the workhouse, if not to the jail. Ask a great painter to take that man's portrait, rags, squalor, and all; and kings will bid for the picture. You would thrust the man from your doors, you would place the portrait in your palaces. It is the same with qualities, the portrait is worth more than the truth. What is virtue without character? But a man without virtue may thrive on a character! What is

genius without success? But how often you bow to success without genius! John Ardworth, possess yourself of the portraits—win the character—seize the success."

"Madame," exclaimed Ardworth, rudely, "this is horrible!"

"Horrible, it may be," said Madame Dalibard, gently, and feeling, perhaps, that she had gone too far: "but it is the world's judgment. *Seem*, then, as well as *be*. You have virtue, as I believe. Well, wrap yourself in it—in your closet. Go into the world, and earn character. If you have genius, let it comfort you. Rush into the crowd, and get success."

"Stop!" cried Ardworth; "I recognise you. How could I be so blind? It is you who have written to me, and in the same strain: you have robbed yourself—you, poor sufferer, to throw extravagance into these strong hands. And why? What am I to you?"

An expression of actual fondness softened Lucretia's face, as she looked up at him, and replied: "I will tell you hereafter what you are to me. First, I confess that it is I whose letters have perplexed, perhaps offended you. The sum that I sent, I do not miss. I have more—will ever have more at your command—never fear. Yes, I wish you to go into the world, not as a dependant, but as an equal to the world's favourites. I wish you to know more of men than mere law-books teach you. I wish you to be in men's mouths, create a circle that shall talk of young Ardworth—that talk would travel to those who can advance your career. The very possession of money in certain stages of life gives assurance to the manner, gives attraction to the address."

"But," said Ardworth, "all this is very well for some favourite of birth and fortune; but for me—yet speak, and plainly; you throw out hints that I am what I know not; but something less dependent on his nerves and his brain than is plain John Ardworth. What is it you mean?"

Madame Dalibard bent her face over her breast, and rocking herself in her chair, seemed to muse for some moments before she answered.

"When I first came to England, some months ago, I desired naturally to learn all the particulars of my family and kindred,

from which my long residence abroad had estranged me. John Walter Ardworth was related to my half-sister, to me he was but a mere connection. However, I knew something of his history, yet I did not know that he *had* a son. Shortly before I came to England, I learned that one who *passed* for his son had been brought up by Mr. Fielden, and from Mr. Fielden I have since learned all the grounds for that belief from which you take the name of Ardworth."

Lucretia paused a moment; and after a glance at the impatient, wondering, and eager countenance that bent intent upon her, she resumed:—

"Your reputed father was, you are doubtless aware, of reckless and extravagant habits. He had been put into the army by my uncle, and he entered the profession with the careless buoyancy of his sanguine nature. I remember those days—that day! Well, to return—where was I?—Walter Ardworth had the folly to entertain strong notions of politics. He dreamt of being a soldier, and yet persuaded himself to be a republican. His notions, so hateful in his profession, got wind; he disguised nothing, he neglected the portraits of things—*appearances*. He excited the rancour of his commanding officer—for politics then, more even than now, were implacable ministrants to hate. Occasion presented itself; during the short Peace of Amiens he had been recalled. He had to head a detachment of soldiers against some mob—in Ireland, I believe; he did not fire on the mob, according to orders—so, at least, it was said: John Walter Ardworth was tried by a court-martial, and broke! But you know all this, perhaps?"

"My poor father! Only in part: I knew that he had been dismissed the army—I believed unjustly. He was a soldier, and yet he dared to think for himself, and be humane!"

"But my uncle had left him a legacy—it brought no blessing,—none of that old man's gold did. Where are they all now?—Dalibard, Susan, and her fair-faced husband?—where? Vernon is in his grave—but one son of many left! Gabriel Varney lives it is true!—and I! But that gold—yea, in our hands,

there was a curse on it! Walter Ardworth had his legacy —his nature was gay; if disgraced in his profession, he found men to pity and praise him—Fools of Party like himself. He lived joyously—drank or gamed, or lent or borrowed. —what matters the wherefore?—he was in debt,—he lived at last a wretched, shifting, fugitive life,—snatching bread where he could,—with the bailiffs at his heels,—then, for a short time, we met again."

Lucretia's brow grew black as night, as her voice dropped at that last sentence, and it was with a start that she continued,—

"In the midst of this hunted existence, Walter Ardworth appeared, late one night, at Mr. Fielden's with an infant. He seemed—so says Mr. Fielden—ill, worn, and haggard. He entered into no explanations with respect to the child that accompanied him, and retired at once to rest. What follows, Mr. Fielden, at my request, has noted down. Read, and see what claim you have to the honourable parentage so vaguely ascribed to you."

As she spoke, Madame Dalibard opened a box on her table, drew forth a paper in Fielden's writing, and placed it in Ardworth's hand. After some preliminary statement of the writer's intimacy with the elder Ardworth, and the appearance of the latter at his house, as related by Madame Dalibard, &c., the document went on thus:—

"The next day, when my poor guest was still in bed, my servant Hannah came to advise me that two persons were without waiting to see me. As is my wont, I bade them be shown in. On their entrance (two rough farmer-looking men they were, who I thought might be coming to hire my little pasture field), I prayed them to speak low, as a sick gentleman was just overhead. Whereupon, and without saying a word further, the two strangers made a rush from the room, leaving me dumb with amazement; in a few moments I heard voices and a scuffle above. I recovered myself, and thinking robbers had entered my peaceful house I called out lustily, when Hannah came in, and we both, taking courage, went up stairs, and found that poor Walter

was in the hands of these supposed robbers, who in truth were but bailiffs. They would not trust him out of their sight for a moment. However, he took it more pleasantly than I could have supposed possible; prayed me in a whisper to take care of the child, and I should soon hear from him again. In less than an hour he was gone. Two days afterwards I received from him a hurried letter, without address, of which this is a copy:—

"'DEAR FRIEND,—I slipped from the bailiffs, and here I am in a safe little tavern in sight of the sea! Mother Country is a very bad parent to me! Mother Brownrigg herself could scarcely be worse. I shall work out my passage to some foreign land, and if I can recover my health (sea-air is bracing), I don't despair of getting my bread honestly, somehow. If ever I can pay my debts, I may return. But, meanwhile, my good old tutor, what will you think of me? You to whom my sole return for so much pains, taken in vain, is another mouth to feed! And no money to pay for the board! Yet you'll not grudge the child a place at your table, will you? No, nor kind, saving Mrs. Fielden, either—God bless her tender, economical soul! You know quite enough of me to be sure that I shall very soon either free you of the boy, or send you something to prevent its being an incumbrance. I would say, love and pity the child for my sake. But I own I feel——. By Jove I must be off—I hear the first signal from the vessel that ——Yours in haste, 'J. W. A.'"

Young Ardworth stopped from the lecture, and sighed heavily. There seemed to him, in this letter, worse than a mock gaiety,—a certain levity and recklessness which jarred on his own high principles. And the want of affection for the child thus abandoned was evident—not one fond word. He resumed the statement with a gloomy and disheartened attention.

"This was all I heard from my poor erring Walter for more than three years; but I knew, in spite of his follies, that his heart was sound at bottom" (the son's eyes brightened here,

and he kissed the paper), "and the child was no burthen to us: we loved it, not only for Ardworth's sake but for its own, and for charity's, and Christ's. Ardworth's second letter was as follows:—

"'*En iterum Crispinus!*—I am still alive, and getting on in the world—ay, and honestly too; I am no longer spending heedlessly; I am saving for my debts, and I shall live, I trust, to pay off every farthing. First, for my debt to you, I send an order, not signed in my name, but equally valid, on Messrs. Drummond, for 250*l.* Repay yourself what the boy has cost. Let him be educated to get his own living,—if clever, as a scholar or a lawyer,—if dull as a tradesman. Whatever I may gain, he will have his own way to make. I ought to tell you the story connected with his birth, but it is one of pain and shame: and, on reflection, I feel that I have no right to injure him by affixing to his early birth an opprobrium of which he himself is guiltless. If ever I return to England, you shall know all, and by your counsels I will abide. Love to all your happy family.—Your grateful Friend and Pupil.'

"From this letter I began to suspect that the poor boy was probably not born in wedlock, and that Ardworth's silence arose from his compunction. I conceived it best never to mention this suspicion to John himself as he grew up. Why should I afflict him by a doubt from which his own father shrank, and which might only exist in my own inexperienced and uncharitable interpretation of some vague words? When John was fourteen, I received from Messrs. Drummond a further sum of 500*l.*, but without any line from Ardworth, and only to the effect that Messrs. Drummond were directed by a correspondent in Calcutta to pay me the said sum on behalf of expenses incurred for the maintenance of the child left to my charge by John Walter Ardworth. My young pupil had been two years at the university when I received the letter of which this is a copy:—

"'How are you?—still well—still happy?—let me hope so! I have not written to you, dear old friend, but I have not been

forgetful of you—I have inquired of you through my correspondents, and have learned, from time to time, such accounts as satisfied my grateful affection for you. I find that you have given the boy my name. Well, let him bear it—it is nothing to boast of such as it became in my person; but, mind, I do not, therefore, acknowledge him as *my* son. I wish him to think himself without parents, without other aid in the career of life than his own industry and talent,—if talent he has. Let him go through the healthful probation of toil—let him search for and find independence. Till he is of age, 150*l.* per annum will be paid quarterly to your account for him at Messrs. Drummond's. If then, to set him up in any business or profession, a sum of money be necessary, name the amount by a line, signed A. B., Calcutta, to the care of Messrs. Drummond, and it will reach, and find me disposed to follow your instructions. But after that time all further supply from me will cease. Do not suppose, because I send this from India, that I am laden with rupees; all I can hope to attain is a competence. That boy is not the only one who has claims to share it. Even, therefore, if I had the wish to rear him to the extravagant habits that ruined myself, I have not the power. Yes!—let him lean on his own strength. In the letter you send me, write fully of your family, your sons, and write as to a man who can perhaps help them in the world, and will be too happy thus in some slight degree to repay all he owes you. You would smile approvingly if you saw me now—a steady, money-getting man, but still yours as ever.

"'P.S.—Do not let the boy write to me, nor give him this clue to my address.'

"On the receipt of this letter, I wrote fully to Ardworth about the excellent promise and conduct of his poor neglected son. I told him truly he was a son any father might be proud of, and rebuked, even to harshness, Walter's unseemly tone respecting him. One's child is one's child, however the father may have wronged the mother. To this letter I never received any answer. When John was of age, and had made himself independent of want, by obtaining a college fellowship, I spoke

to him about his prospects. I told him that his father, though residing abroad and for some reason keeping himself concealed, had munificently paid hitherto for his maintenance, and would lay down what might be necessary to start him in business, or perhaps place him in the army; but that this father might be better pleased if he could show a love of independence, and henceforth maintain himself. I knew the boy I spoke to—John thought as I did, and I never applied for another donation to the elder Ardworth. The allowance ceased: John since then has maintained himself. I have heard no more from his father, though I have written often to the address he gave me. I begin to fear that he is dead. I once went up to town and saw one of the heads of Messrs. Drummond's firm—a very polite gentleman, but he could give me no information, except that he obeyed instructions from a correspondent at Calcutta—one Mr. Macfarren. Whereon I wrote to Mr. Macfarren, and asked him, as I thought very pressingly, to tell me all he knew of poor Ardworth the elder. He answered shortly that he knew of no such person at all, and that A. B. was a French merchant, settled in Calcutta, who had been dead for above two years. I now gave up all hopes of any further intelligence, and was more convinced than ever that I had acted rightly in withholding from poor John my correspondence with his father. The lad had been curious and inquisitive naturally, but when I told him that I thought it my duty to his father to be so reserved, he forbore to press me. I have only to add, first, that by all the inquiries I could make of the surviving members of Walter Ardworth's family it seemed their full belief that he had never been married, and therefore I fear we must conclude that he had no legitimate children, which may account for, though it cannot excuse, his neglect; and secondly, with respect to the sums received on dear John's account—I put them all by, capital and interest, deducting only the expense of his first year at Cambridge (the which I could not defray without injuring my own children), and it all stands in his name at Messrs. Drummond's, vested in the Three per Cents. That I have not told him of this was by my poor dear wife's advice; for she said, very sensibly, and she was a shrewd woman on money matters, 'If he knows he has such a large

sum all in the lump, who knows but he may grow idle and extravagant, and spend it at once, like his father before him? whereas, some time or other, he will want to marry, or need money for some particular purpose,—then what a blessing it will be!'

"However, my dear madam, as you know the world better than I do, you can now do as you please, both as to communicating to John all the information herein contained as to his parentage, and as to apprising him of the large sum of which he is lawfully possessed.

"MATTHEW FIELDEN.

"P.S.—In justice to poor John Ardworth, and to show that whatever whim he may have conceived about his own child, he had still a heart kind enough to remember mine, though Heaven knows I said nothing about them in my letters: my eldest boy received an offer of an excellent place in a West India merchant's house, and has got on to be chief clerk, and my second son was presented to a living of one hundred and seventeen pounds a year, by a gentleman he never heard of. Though I never traced these good acts to Ardworth, from whom else could they come?"

Ardworth put down the paper without a word; and Lucretia, who had watched him while he read, was struck with the self-control he evinced when he came to the end of the disclosure. She laid her hand on his, and said,—

"Courage!—you have lost nothing!"

"Nothing!" said Ardworth, with a bitter smile. "A father's love and a father's name—nothing!"

"But," exclaimed Lucretia, "is this man your father? Does a father's heart beat in one line of those hard sentences? No, no; it seems to me probable—it seems to me almost certain, that you are—" she stopped, and continued with a calmer accent, "near to my own blood. I am now in England—in London—to prosecute the inquiry built upon that hope. If, so—if so—you shall—" Madame Dalibard again stopped abruptly, and there was something terrible in the very

exultation of her countenance. She drew a long breath, and resumed, with an evident effort at self-command—"If so, I have a right to the interest I feel for you. Suffer me yet to be silent as to the grounds of my belief, and—and—love me a little in the meanwhile!"

Her voice trembled, as if with rushing tears, at these last words, and there was almost an agony in the tone in which they were said, and in the gesture of the clasped hands she held out to him.

Much moved (amidst all his mingled emotions at the tale thus made known to him) by the manner and voice of the narrator, Ardworth bent down and kissed the extended hands. Then he rose abruptly, walked to and fro the room, muttering to himself—paused opposite the window—threw it open, as for air, and, indeed, fairly gasped for breath. When he turned round, however, his face was composed, and folding his arms on his large breast with a sudden action, he said aloud and yet rather to himself than to his listener,—

"What matter, after all, by what name men call our fathers? We ourselves make our own fate! Bastard or noble, not a jot care I. Give me ancestors I will not disgrace them: raze from my lot even the very name of father, and my sons shall have an ancestor in me!"

As he thus spoke, there was a rough grandeur in his hard face and the strong ease of his powerful form. And while thus standing and thus looking the door opened, and Varney walked in abruptly.

These two men had met occasionally at Madame Dalibard's, but no intimacy had been established between them. Varney was formal and distant to Ardworth and Ardworth felt a repugnance to Varney. With the instinct of sound, sterling, weighty natures, he detected at once, and disliked heartily, that something of gaudy, false, exaggerated, and hollow, which pervaded Gabriel Varney's talk and manner—even the trick of his walk and the cut of his dress. And Ardworth wanted that boyish and beautiful luxuriance of character which belonged to Percival St. John, easy to please and to be pleased, and expanding into the warmth of admiration for all talent and all distinction. For art, if not the highest, Ardworth cared

not a straw; it was nothing to him that Varney painted and composed, and ran showily through the jargon of literary babble, or toyed with the puzzles of unsatisfying metaphysics. He saw but a charlatan, and he had not yet learned from experience what strength and what danger lie hid in the boa parading its colours in the sun, and shifting, in the sensual sportiveness of its being, from bough to bough.

Varney halted in the middle of the room, as his eye rested first on Ardworth, and then glanced towards Madame Dalibard. But Ardworth, jarred from his reverie or resolves by the sound of a voice discordant to his ear at all times, especially in the mood which then possessed him, scarcely returned Varney's salutation, buttoned his coat over his chest, seized his hat, and upsetting two chairs, and very considerably disturbing the gravity of a round table, forced his way to Madame Dalibard, pressed her hand, and said in a whisper, "I shall see you again soon," and vanished.

Varney, smoothing his hair with fingers that shone with rings, slid into the seat next Madame Dalibard, which Ardworth had lately occupied, and said, "If I were a Clytemnestra, I should dread an Orestes in such a son!"

Madame Dalibard shot towards the speaker one of the side-long suspicious glances which of old had characterised Lucretia, and said,—

"Clytemnestra was happy! The Furies slept to her crime, and haunted but the avenger."

"Hist!" said Varney.

The door opened, and Ardworth reappeared.

"I quite forgot what I half came to know. How is Helen? Did she return home safe?"

"Safe—yes!"

"Dear girl, I am glad to hear it! Where is she? Not gone to those Mivers' again? I am no aristocrat, but why should one couple together refinement and vulgarity?"

"Mr. Ardworth," said Madame Dalibard, with haughty coldness, "my niece is under my care, and you will permit me to judge for myself how to discharge the trust. Mr. Mivers is her own relation—a nearer one than you are."

Not at all abashed by the rebuke, Ardworth said carelessly, "Well, I shall talk to you again on that subject. Meanwhile, pray give my love to her—Helen, I mean."

Madame Dalibard half rose in her chair, then sank back again, motioning with her hand to Ardworth to approach. Varney rose and walked to the window, as if sensible that something was about to be said not meant for his ear.

When Ardworth was close to her chair, Madame Dalibard grasped his hand with a vigour that surprised him, and drawing him nearer still, whispered as he bent down—

"I will give Helen your love, if it is a cousin's—or, if you will, a brother's love. Do you intend—do you feel—another, a warmer love? Speak, sir!" and drawing suddenly back, she gazed on his face with a stern and menacing expression, her teeth set, and the lips firmly pressed together.

Ardworth, though a little startled, and half angry, answered with the low ironical laugh not uncommon to him, "Pish! you ladies are apt to think us men much greater fools than we are. A briefless lawyer is not very inflammable tinder. Yes, a cousin's love—quite enough. Poor little Helen! time enough to put other notions into her head; and then—she will have a sweetheart, gay and handsome like herself!"

"Ay," said Madame Dalibard, with a slight smile, "ay, I am satisfied. Come soon."

Ardworth nodded, and hurried down the stairs. As he gained the door, he caught sight of Helen at a distance, bending over a flower-bed in the neglected garden. He paused, irresolute, a moment. "No," he muttered to himself; "no, I am fit company only for myself! A long walk into the fields, and then away with these mists round the Past and Future; the Present at least is mine!"

CHAPTER V.

THE WEAVERS AND THE WOOF.

"AND what," said Varney—"what, while we are pursuing a fancied clue, and seeking to provide first a name, and then a fortune for this young lawyer—what steps have you really taken to meet the danger that menaces *me*—to secure, if our inquiries fail, an independence for yourself? Months have elapsed, and you have still shrunk from advancing the great scheme upon which we built, when the daughter of Susan Mainwaring was admitted to your hearth."

"Why recall me, in these rare moments when I feel myself human still—why recall me back to the nethermost abyss of revenge and crime? Oh! let me be sure that I have still a son! Even if John Ardworth, with his gifts and energies, be denied to me!—a son—though in rags, I will give him wealth! —a son, though ignorant as the merest boor, I will pour into his brain my dark wisdom!—a son!—a son!—my heart swells at the word. Ah, you sneer! Yes, my heart swells, but not with the mawkish fondness of a feeble mother. In a son, I shall live again—transmigrate from this tortured and horrible life of mine—drink back my youth. In him I shall rise from my fall—strong in his power—great in his grandeur. It is because I was born a woman—had woman's poor passions and infirm weakness, that I am what I am—I would transfer myself into the soul of man—man who has the strength to act, and the privilege to rise. Into the bronze of man's nature I would pour the experience which has broken, with its fierce elements, the puny vessel of clay. Yes, Gabriel, in return for all I have done and sacrificed for you, I ask but co-operation in that one hope of my shattered and storm-beat being. Bear—forbear—await; risk not that hope by some wretched peddling crime, which will bring on us both detection—some wanton revelry in guilt, which is not worth the terror that treads upon its heels."

"You forget," answered Varney, with a kind of submissive

sullenness, for whatever had passed between these two persons in their secret and fearful intimacy, there was still a power in Lucretia, surviving her fall amidst the fiends, that impressed Varney with the only respect he felt for man or woman—"you forget strangely the nature of our elaborate and master project, when you speak of '*peddling* crime,' or '*wanton* revelry' in guilt! You forget, too, how every hour that we waste, deepens the peril that surrounds me, and may sweep from your side the sole companion that can aid you in your objects—nay, without whom they must wholly fail. Let me speak first of that most urgent danger, for your memory seems short and troubled, since you have learned only to hope the recovery of your son. If this man, Stubmore, in whom the trust created by my uncle's will is now vested—once comes to town—once begins to bustle about his accursed projects of transferring the money from the Bank of England, I tell you again and again that my forgery on the bank will be detected, and that transportation will be the smallest penalty inflicted; part of the forgery, as you know, was committed on your behalf, to find the moneys necessary for the research for your son—committed on the clear understanding that our project on Helen should repay me—should enable me, perhaps undetected, to restore the sums illegally abstracted, or, at the worst, to confess to Stubmore, whose character I well know—that, oppressed by difficulties, I had yielded to temptation—that I had forged his name (as I had forged his father's) as an authority to sell the capital from the bank, and that now, in replacing the money, I repaid my error, and threw myself on his indulgence—on his silence. I say, that I know enough of the man to know, that I should be thus cheaply saved; or at the worst, I should have but to strengthen his compassion by a bribe to his avarice, but if I cannot replace the money—I am lost."

"Well, well," said Lucretia, "the money you shall have, let me but find my son, and——"

"Grant me patience!" cried Varney, impetuously; "but what can your son do, if found, unless you endow him with the heritage of Laughton? To do that, Helen, who comes next to Percival St. John, in the course of the entail, must cease

to live! Have I not aided—am I not aiding you hourly, in your grand objects? This evening I shall see a man whom I have long lost sight of, but who has acquired in a lawyer's life the true scent after evidence—if that evidence exist, it shall be found. I have just learned his address. By to-morrow he shall be on the track. I have stinted myself to save from the results of the last forgery the gold to whet his zeal. For the rest, as I have said, your design involves the removal of two lives. Already, over the one more difficult to slay the shadow creeps and the pall hangs. I have won, as you wished, and as was necessary, young St. John's familiar acquaintance; when the hour comes, he is in my hands."

Lucretia smiled sternly: "So!" she said, between her ground teeth, "the father forbade me the house that was my heritage! I have but to lift a finger and breathe a word, and, desolate as I am, I thrust from that home the son! The spoiler left me the world—I leave his son the grave!"

"But," said Varney, doggedly pursuing his dreadful object, "why force me to repeat that his is not the only life between you and your son's inheritance? St. John gone, Helen still remains. And what, if your researches fail, are we to lose the rich harvest which Helen will yield us—a harvest you reap with the same sickle which gathers in your revenge? Do you no longer see in Helen's face the features of her mother? Is the perfidy of William Mainwaring forgotten or forgiven?"

"Gabriel Varney," said Lucretia, in a hollow and tremulous voice; "when in that hour in which my whole being was revulsed, and I heard the cord snap from the anchor, and saw the demons of the storm gather round my bark—when, in that hour, I stooped calmly down and kissed my rival's brow, I murmured an oath, which seemed not inspired by my own soul, but by an influence henceforth given to my fate—I vowed that the perfidy dealt to me should be repaid—I vowed that the ruin of my own existence should fall on the brow which I kissed. I vowed that if shame and disgrace were to supply the inheritance I had forfeited, I would not stand alone amidst the scorn of the pitiless world. In the vision of my agony, I saw, afar, the altar dressed, and the bride-chamber prepared;

and I breathed my curse, strong as prophecy, on the marriage-hearth and the marriage-bed. Why dream, then, that I would rescue the loathed child of that loathed union from your grasp? But is the time come? Yours may be come—is mine?"

Something so awful there was in the look of his accomplice—so intense in the hate of her low voice—that Varney, wretch as he was, and contemplating at that very hour the foulest and most hideous guilt, drew back, appalled.

Madame Dalibard resumed, and in a somewhat softer tone, but softened only by the anguish of despair.

"Oh, had it been otherwise, what might I have been! Given over from that hour to the very incarnation of plotting crime—none to resist the evil impulse of my own maddening heart—the partner, forced on me by fate leading me deeper and deeper into the inextricable hell—from that hour, fraud upon fraud, guilt upon guilt, infamy heaped on infamy, till I stand a marvel to myself that the thunderbolt falls not—that Nature thrusts not from her breast a living outrage on all her laws! Was I not justified in the desire of retribution? Every step that I fell, every glance that I gave to the gulf below, increased but in me the desire for revenge. All my acts had flowed from one fount—should the stream roll pollution and the fount spring pure?"

"You have had your revenge on your rival and her husband."

"I had it, and I passed on!" said Lucretia, with nostrils dilated as with haughty triumph; "they were crushed, and I suffered them to live! Nay, when, by chance, I heard of William Mainwaring's death, I bowed down my head, and I almost think I wept. The old days came back upon me. Yes, I wept! But I had not destroyed their love. No, no; there I had miserably failed. A pledge of that love lived. I had left their hearth barren; Fate sent them a comfort, which I had not foreseen. And suddenly my hate returned, my wrongs rose again, my vengeance was not sated. The love that had destroyed more than my life—my soul, rose again and cursed me in the face of Helen. The oath which I took when I kissed my rival's brow, demanded another prey when I kissed the child of those nuptials."

"You are prepared at last, then, to act?" cried Varney, in a tone of savage joy.

At that moment, close under the window, rose, sudden and sweet, the voice of one singing—the young voice of Helen. The words were so distinct, that they came to the ears of the dark-plotting and guilty pair. In the song itself there was little to remark, or peculiarly apposite to the consciences of those who heard; yet in the extreme and touching purity of the voice, and in the innocence of the general spirit of the words, trite as might be the image they conveyed, there was something that contrasted so fearfully their own thoughts and minds, that they sat silent, looking vacantly into each other's faces, and shrinking perhaps to turn their eyes within themselves.

HELEN'S HYMN.

"Ye fade, yet still how sweet, ye Flowers!
Your scent outlives the bloom!
So, Father, may my mortal hours
Grow sweeter towards the tomb!

"In withered leaves a healing cure
The simple gleaners find;
So may our withered hopes endure
In virtues left behind!

"Oh, not to me be vainly given
The lesson ye bestow,
Of thoughts that rise in sweets to Heaven,
And turn to use below."

The song died, but still the listeners remained silent, till at length, shaking off the effect, with his laugh of discordant irony, Varney said,—

"Sweet innocence, fresh from the nursery! Would it not be sin to suffer the world to mar it? You hear the prayer—why not grant it, and let the flower '*turn to use below*'?"

"Ah, but could it wither first!" muttered Lucretia, with an accent of suppressed rage. "Do you think that her—that his—daughter is to me but a vulgar life to be sacrificed merely for gold? Imagine away your sex, man! Women only know what I—such as I, woman still—feel in the presence of the pure! Do you fancy that I should not have held death a blessing, if death could have found me in youth such as

Helen is? Ah, could she but live to suffer! Die! Well, since it must be—since my son requires the sacrifice—do as you will with the victim that death mercifully snatches from my grasp. I could have wished to prolong her life, to load it with some fragment of the curse her parents heaped upon me!—baffled love, and ruin, and despair! I could have hoped, in this division of the spoil, that mine had been the vengeance, if yours the gold. You want the life—I the heart;—the heart to torture first, and then—why then—more willingly than I do now, could I have thrown the carcase to the jackal!"

"Listen!" began Varney, when the door opened, and Helen herself stood unconsciously smiling at the threshold.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LAWYER AND THE BODY-SNATCHER.

THAT same evening, Beck, according to appointment, met Percival, and showed him the dreary-looking house which held the fair stranger who had so attracted his youthful fancy. And Percival looked at the high walls, with the sailor's bold desire for adventure, while confused visions reflected from plays, operas, and novels, in which scaling walls with rope-ladders and dark lanterns, was represented as the natural avocation of a lover, flitted across his brain: —and certainly he gave a deep sigh, as his common sense plucked him back from such romance However, having now ascertained the house, it would be easy to learn the name of its inmates, and to watch or make his opportunity. As slowly and reluctantly he walked back to the spot where he had left his cabriolet, he entered into some desultory conversation with his strange guide; and the pity he had before conceived for Beck increased upon him, as he talked and listened. This benighted mind, only illumined by a kind of miserable astuteness, and that "cunning of the

belly" which is born of want to engender avarice—this joyless temperament—this age in youth—this living reproach, rising up from the stones of London against our social indifference to the souls which wither and rot under the hard eyes of science and the deaf ears of wealth, had a pathos for his lively sympathies and his fresh heart.

"If ever you want a friend, come to me," said St. John, abruptly.

The sweeper stared, and a gleam of diviner nature, a ray of gratitude and unselfish devotion, darted through the fog and darkness of his mind. He stood, with his hat off, watching the wheels of the cabriolet, as it bore away the happy child of fortune, and then, shaking his head, as at some puzzle that perplexed and defied his comprehension, strode back to the town, and bent his way homeward.

Between two and three hours after Percival thus parted from the sweeper, a man whose dress was little in accordance with the scene in which we present him, threaded his way through a foul labyrinth of alleys, in the worst part of St. Giles's; a neighbourhood, indeed, carefully shunned at dusk, by wealthy passengers; for here dwelt not only Penury in its grimmest shape, but the desperate and dangerous guilt, which is not to be lightly encountered in its haunts and domiciles. Here children imbibe vice with their mother's milk. Here Prostitution, commencing with childhood, grows fierce and sanguinary in the teens, and leagues with theft and murder. Here slinks the pickpocket—here emerges the burglar—here skulks the felon. Yet all about and all around, here, too, may be found virtue in its rarest and noblest form—virtue outshining circumstance and defying temptation—the virtue of utter poverty, which groans and yet sins not. So interwoven are these webs of penury and fraud, that in one court your life is not safe, but turn to the right hand, and in the other, you might sleep safely in that worse than Irish shealing, though your pockets were full of gold. Through these haunts, the ragged and penniless may walk unfearing, for they have nothing to dread from the lawless—more, perhaps, from the law; but the wealthy, the respectable, the spruce, the dainty,

let them beware the spot, unless the policeman is in sight or day is in the skies!

As this passenger, whose appearance, as we have implied, was certainly not that of a denizen, turned into one of the alleys, a rough hand seized him by the arm, and suddenly a group of girls and tatterdemallions issued from a house, in which the lower shutters unclosed, showed a light burning, and surrounded him with a hoarse whoop.

The passenger whispered a word in the ear of the grim blackguard who had seized him, and his arm was instantly released.

"Hist! a pal: he has the catch," said the blackguard, surlily. The group gave way, and by the light of the clear starlit skies, and a single lamp hung at the entrance of the alley, gazed upon the stranger. But they made no effort to detain him; and as he disappeared in the distant shadows, hastened back into the wretched hostelry, where they had been merry-making. Meanwhile, the stranger gained a narrow court, and stopped before a house in one of its angles—a house taller than the rest, —so much taller than the rest, that it had the effect of a tower; you would have supposed it (perhaps rightly) to be the last remains of some ancient building of importance, around which, as population thickened, and fashion changed, the huts below it had insolently sprung up. Quaint and massive pilasters, black with the mire and soot of centuries, flanked the deep-set door; the windows were heavy with mullions and transoms, and strongly barred in the lower floor; but few of the panes were whole, and only here and there had any attempt been made to keep out the wind and rain by rags, paper, old shoes, old hats, and other ingenious contrivances. Beside the door was conveniently placed a row of some ten or twelve bell-pulls, appertaining no doubt to the various lodgments into which the building was subdivided. The stranger did not seem very familiar with the appurtenances of the place. He stood in some suspense, as to the proper bell to select; but at last, guided by a brass-plate annexed to one of the pulls, which, though it was too dark to decipher the inscription, denoted a claim to superior gentility to the rest of that nameless class, he

hazarded a tug, which brought forth a larum loud enough to startle the whole court from its stillness.

In a minute or less the casement in one of the upper stories opened, a head peered forth, and one of those voices peculiar to low debauch—raw, cracked, and hoarse—called out, "Who waits?"

"Is it you, Grabman?" asked the stranger, dubiously.

"Yes; Nicholas Grabman, attorney-at-law, sir, at your service: and your name?"

"Jason," answered the stranger.

"Ho! there—ho! Beck!" cried the cracked voice to some one within; "go down and open the door."

In a few moments the heavy portal swung and creaked, and yawned sullenly, and a gaunt form, half-undressed, with an inch of a farthing rushlight, glimmering through a battered lantern, in its hand, presented itself to Jason. The last eyed the ragged porter sharply.

"Do you live here?"

"Yes," answered Beck, with the cringe habitual to him. "H-up the ladder, vith the rats—drat'em."

"Well, lead on—hold up the lantern; a devil of a dark place this!" grumbled Jason, as he nearly stumbled over sundry broken chattles, and gained a flight of rude, black, broken stairs, that creaked under his tread.

"'St! 'st!" said Beck, between his teeth, as the stranger halting at the second floor, demanded, in no gentle tones, whether Mr. Grabman lived in the chimney-pots.

"'St! 'st!—don't make such a rumpus, or No. 7 will be at you."

"What do I care for No. 7?—and who the devil is No 7?"

"A body-snatcher!" whispered Beck, with a shudder. "He's a dillicut sleeper, can't abide having his night's rest sp'ilt. And he's the houtrageoustest great cretur, when he's h-up in his tantrums—it makes your 'air stand on ind to 'ear him!"

"I should like very much to hear him, then," said the stranger, curiously. And while he spoke, the door of No. 7 opened abruptly. A huge head, covered with matted hair, was thrust

for a moment through the aperture, and two dull eyes, that seemed covered with a film, like that of the birds which feed on the dead, met the stranger's bold sparkling orbs.

"Hell and fury!" bawled out the voice of this ogre like a clap of near thunder, "if you two keep tramp, tramp there close at my door I'll make you meat for the surgeons—b—— you!"

"Stop a moment, my civil friend," said the stranger, advancing; "just stand where you are; I should like to make a sketch of your head."

That head protruded farther from the door, and with it an enormous bulk of chest and shoulder. But the adventurous visitor was not to be daunted. He took out, very coolly, a pencil, and the back of a letter, and began his sketch.

The body-snatcher stared at him an instant in mute astonishment; but that operation and the composure of the artist were so new to him that they actually inspired him with terror. He slunk back—banged to the door; and the stranger, putting up his implements, said, with a disdainful laugh, to Beck, who had slunk away into a corner,—

"No. 7 knows well how to take care of No. 1. Lead on, and be quick, then!"

As they continued to mount, they heard the body-snatcher growling and blaspheming in his den, and the sound made Beck clamber the quicker, till at the next landing-place, he took breath, threw open a door, and Jason, pushing him aside, entered first.

The interior of the room bespoke better circumstances than might have been supposed from the approach: the floor was covered with sundry scraps of carpet, formerly of different hues and patterns, but mellowed by time into one threadbare mass of grease and canvas. There was a good fire on the hearth, though the night was warm; there were sundry volumes piled round the walls, in the binding peculiar to law books: in a corner stood a tall desk, of the fashion used by clerks; perched on tall slim legs, and co npanioned by a tall slim stool. On a table before the fire were scattered the remains of the nightly meal.—broiled bones, the skeleton of a herring; and the steam

rose from a tumbler containing a liquid colourless as water, but poisonous as gin.

The room was squalid and dirty, and bespoke mean and slovenly habits; but it did not bespeak penury and want; it had even an air of filthy comfort of its own—the comfort of the swine in its warm sty. The occupant of the chamber was in keeping with the localities. Figure to yourself a man of middle height—not thin, but void of all muscular flesh, bloated, puffed, unwholesome. He was dressed in a grey flannel gown and short breeches, the stockings wrinkled and distained, the feet in slippers. The stomach was that of a portly man, the legs those of a skeleton; the cheeks, full and swollen, like a ploughboy's, but livid, bespeckled, of a dull lead-colour, like a patient in the dropsy. The head covered in patches with thin yellowish hair, gave some promise of intellect, for the forehead was high, and appeared still more so from partial baldness; the eyes, embedded in fat and wrinkled skin, were small and lustreless, but they still had that acute look which education and ability communicate to the human orb; the mouth most showed the animal—full-lipped, coarse, and sensual; while behind one of two great ears stuck a pen.

You see before you, then, this slatternly figure—slipshod, half-clothed, with a sort of shabby demi-gentility about it—half ragamuffin, half clerk; while in strong contrast appeared the new comer, scrupulously neat, new—with bright black satin stock, coat cut jauntily to the waist, varnished boots, kid gloves, and trim moustache.

Behind this sleek and comely personage, on knock-knees, in torn shirt open at the throat, with apathetic, listless, unlighted face, stood the lean and gawky Beck.

"Set a chair for the gentleman," said the inmate of the chamber to Beck, with a dignified wave of the hand.

"How do you do, Mr.—Mr.—humph—Jason?—how do you do?—always smart and blooming; the world thrives with you."

"The world is a farm, that thrives with all who till it properly, Grabman," answered Jason, drily; and with his handkerchief he

carefully dusted the chair, on which he then daintily deposited his person.

"But who is your Ganymede,—your valet—your gentleman-usher?"

"Oh, a lad about town, who lodges above, and does odd jobs for me—brushes my coat, cleans my shoes, and after his day's work goes an errand now and then. Make yourself scarce, Beck! —Anatomy, vanish!"

Beck grinned, nodded, pulled hard at a flake of his hair, and closed the door.

"One of your brotherhood, that?" asked Jason, carelessly.

"He, oaf!—no," said Grabman, with profound contempt in his sickly visage. "He works for his bread!—instinct!—turnspits and truffle-dogs, and some silly men have it! What an age since we met—shall I mix you a tumbler?"

"You know I never drink your vile spirits; though in Champagne and Bordeaux I am any man's match."

"And how the devil do you keep old black thoughts out of your mind by those washy potations?"

"Old black thoughts!—of what?"

"Of black actions, Jason. We have not met since you paid me for recommending the nurse who attended your uncle in his last illness."

"Well, poor coward?"

Grabman knit his thin eyebrows, and gnawed his blubber lips,—

"I am no coward as you know."

"Not when a thing is to be done, but after it is done. You brave the substance, and tremble at the shadow. I dare say you see ugly goblins in the dark, Grabman?"

"Ay, ay; but it is no use talking to you. You call yourself Jason because of your yellow hair, or your love for the golden fleece; but your old comrades call you *Rattlesnake;* and you have its blood, as its venom."

"And its charm, man," added Jason, with a strange smile, that, though hypocritical and constrained, had yet a certain softness, and added greatly to the comeliness of features, which many might call beautiful, and all would allow to be regular and symmetrical. "I shall find at least ten love-letters

on my table when I go home. But enough of these fopperies; I am here on business."

"Law, of course; I am your man—who's the victim?" and a hideous grin on Grabman's face contrasted the sleek smile that yet lingered upon his visitor's.

"No; something less hazardous, but not less lucrative than our old practices. This is a business that may bring you hundreds, thousands—that may take you from this hovel to speculate at the West End—that may change your gin into Lafitte, and your herring into venison—that may lift the broken attorney again upon the wheel,—again to roll down, it may be; but that is your affair."

"'Fore Gad, open the case," cried Grabman, eagerly, and, shoving aside the ignoble relics of his supper, he leaned his elbows on the table, and his chin on his damp palms, while eyes that positively brightened into an expression of greedy and relentless intelligence, were fixed upon his visitor.

"The case runs thus," said Jason: "Once upon a time, there lived, at an old house in Hampshire, called Laughton, a wealthy baronet named St. John. He was a bachelor—his estates at his own disposal. He had two nieces and a more distant kinsman. His eldest niece lived with him—she was supposed to be destined for his heiress; circumstances, needless to relate, brought upon this girl her uncle's displeasure—she was dismissed his house. Shortly afterwards he died, leaving to his kinsman—a Mr. Vernon—his estates, with remainder to Vernon's issue, and, in default thereof—first, to the issue of the younger niece, next to that of the elder and disinherited one. The elder married, and was left a widow, without children. She married *again*, and had a son. Her second husband, for some reason or other, conceived ill opinions of his wife. In his last illness (he did not live long) he resolved to punish the wife by robbing the mother. He sent away the son—nor have we been able to discover him since. It is that son whom you are to find."

"I see, I see!—go on," said Grabman. "This son is now the remainderman. How lost?—when?—what year?—what trace?"

"Patience! You will find in this paper the date of the loss, and the age of the child, then a mere infant. Now for the trace. This husband—did I tell you his name?—no—Alfred Braddell—had one friend more intimate than the rest—John Walter Ardworth, a cashiered officer, a ruined man, pursued by bill-brokers, Jews, and bailiffs. To this man we have lately had reason to believe that the child was given. Ardworth, however, was shortly afterwards obliged to fly his creditors. We know that he went to India, but if residing there, it must have been under some new name, and we fear he is now dead. All our inquiries at least after this man have been fruitless. Before he went abroad, he left with his old tutor a child, corresponding in age to that of Mrs. Braddell's. In this child she thinks she recognises her son. All that you have to do is to trace his identity, by good legal evidence—don't smile in that foolish way—I mean sound, *bonâ fide* evidence, that will stand the fire of cross-examination; you know what *that* is! You will therefore find out—first, whether Braddell did consign his child to Ardworth, and, if so, you must then follow Ardworth, with that child in his keeping, to Matthew Fielden's house, whose address you find noted in the paper I gave you, together with many other memoranda as to Ardworth's creditors, and those whom he is likely to have come across."

"John Ardworth, I see!"

"John *Walter* Ardworth, commonly called Walter; he, like me, preferred to be known only by his second baptismal name. He, because of a favourite Radical godfather—I, because Honoré is an inconvenient Gallicism, and perhaps when Honoré Mirabeau (*my* godfather) went out of fashion with the *sans culottes*, my father thought Gabriel a safer designation. Now I have told you all."

"What is the mother's maiden name?"

"Her maiden name was Clavering; she was married under that of Dalibard, her first husband."

"And," said Grabman, looking over the notes in the paper given to him, "it is at Liverpool that the husband died, and whence the child was sent away?"

"It is so; to Liverpool you will go first. I tell you fairly, the task is difficult, for hitherto it has foiled me. I knew but one man who, without flattery, could succeed; and therefore I spared no pains to find out Nicholas Grabman. You have the true ferret's faculty; you, too, are a lawyer, and snuff evidence in every breath. Find up a son—a legal son—a son to be shown in a court of law, and the moment he steps into the lands and the hall of Laughton, you have 5000*l.*"

"Can I have a bond to that effect?"

"My bond, I fear, is worth no more than my word. Trust to the last;—if I break it, you know enough of my secrets to hang me!"

"Don't talk of hanging, I hate that subject. But stop—if found, does this son succeed? Did this Mr. Vernon leave no heir—this other sister continue single, or prove barren?"

"Oh, true! he, Mr. Vernon, who by will took the name of St. John,—he left issue—but only one son still survives, a minor and unmarried. The sister, too, left a daughter; both are poor, sickly creatures—their lives not worth a straw. Never mind them. You find Vincent Braddell, and he will not be long out of his property, nor you out of your 5000*l.*! You see, under these circumstances, a bond might become dangerous evidence!"

Grabman emitted a fearful and tremulous chuckle—a laugh, like the laugh of a superstitious man when you talk to him of ghosts and churchyards. He chuckled—and his hair bristled! But, after a pause, in which he seemed to wrestle with his own conscience, he said—"Well, well, you are a strange man, Jason, you love your joke—I have nothing to do, except to find out this ultimate remainderman—mind that!"

"Perfectly; nothing like subdivision of labour."

"The search will be expensive!"

"There is oil for your wheels," answered Jason, putting a note-book into his confidant's hands. "But mind, you waste it not; no tricks, no false play, with me; you know Jason, or, if you like the name better, you know the Rattlesnake!"

"I will account for every penny," said Grabman, eagerly, and clasping his hands, while his pale face grew livid.

"I do not doubt it, my quill-driver. Look sharp, start to-

morrow! Get thyself decent clothes, be sober, cleanly, and respectable. Act as a man who sees before him five thousand pounds. And now, light me down stairs."

With the candle in his hand, Grabman stole down the rugged steps even more timorously than Beck had ascended them, and put his finger to his mouth as they came in the dread vicinity of No. 7. But Jason, or rather Gabriel Varney, with that fearless, reckless bravado of temper, which, while causing half his guilt, threw at times a false glitter over its baseness, piqued by the cowardice of his comrade—gave a lusty kick at the closed door, and shouted out—"Old grave-stealer, come out, and let me finish your picture. Out, out!—I say—out!" Grabman left the candle on the steps, and made but three bounds to his own room.

At the third shout of his disturber, the Resurrection-man threw open his door violently, and appeared at the gap—the upward flare of the candle showing the deep lines ploughed in his hideous face, and the immense strength of his gigantic trunk and limbs. Slight, fair, and delicate as he was, Varney eyed him deliberately, and trembled not.

"What do you want with me?" said the terrible voice, tremulous with rage.

"Only to finish your portrait as Pluto. He was the god of Hell, you know."

The next moment, the vast hand of the ogre hung like a great cloud over Gabriel Varney. This last, ever on his guard, sprang aside, and the light gleamed on the steel of a pistol. "Hands off!—or——"

The click of the pistol-cock finished the sentence. The ruffian halted. A glare of disappointed fury gave a momentary lustre to his dull eyes. "P'raps, I shall meet you again one o' these days, or nights, and I shall know ye in ten thousand."

"Nothing like a bird in the hand, Master Grave-stealer Where can *we* ever meet again?"

"P'raps in the fields—p'raps on the road—p'raps at the Old Bailey—p'raps at the gallows—p'raps in the convict-ship. I knows what *that* is! I was chained night and day once to a

chap jist like you—didn't I break his spurit—didn't I spile his sleep! Ho, ho!—you looks a bit less varmently howdacious now—my flash cove!"

Varney hitherto had not known one pang of fear, one quicker beat of the heart before. But the image presented to his irritable fancy (always prone to brood over terrors) the image of that companion—chained to him night and day—suddenly quelled his courage—the image stood before him palpably like the *Oulos Oneiros*—the Evil Dream of the Greeks.

He breathed loud. The body-stealer's stupid sense saw that he had produced the usual effect of terror, which gratified his brutal self-esteem: he retreated slowly, inch by inch, to the door, followed by Varney's appalled and staring eye—and closed it with such violence, that the candle was extinguished.

Varney, not daring—yes, literally not daring—to call aloud to Grabman for another light, crept down the dark stairs with hurried, ghostlike steps—and, after groping at the door-handle with one hand, while the other grasped his pistol, with a strain of horror, he succeeded at last in winning access to the street, and stood a moment to collect himself, in the open air,—the damps upon his forehead, and his limbs trembling like one who has escaped by a hairbreadth the crash of a falling house.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RAPE OF THE MATTRESS.

THAT Mr. Grabman slept calmly that night is probable enough, for his gin-bottle was empty the next morning; and it was with eyes more than usually heavy that he doziry followed the movements of Beck, who, according to custom, opened the shutters of the little den adjoining his sitting-room, brushed his clothes, made his fire, set on the kettle to boil, and laid his breakfast things, preparatory to his own departure to the duties of the day. Stretching himself

however, and shaking off slumber, as the remembrance of the enterprise he had undertaken glanced pleasantly across him, Grabman sat up in his bed, and said in a voice that if not maudlin was affectionate, and if not affectionate was maudlin,—

"Beck, you are a good fellow! You have faults—you are human; *humanum est errare*, which means that you sometimes scorch my muffins. But, take you all in all, you are a kind creature. Beck, I am going into the country for some days. I shall leave my key in the hole in the wall—you know; take care of it when you come in. You were out late last night, my poor fellow. Very wrong! Look well to yourself, or who knows? you may be clutched by that blackguard Resurrection-man, No. 7. Well, well! to think of that Jason's foolhardiness. But he's the worse devil of the two. Eh! what was I saying? And always give a look into my room every night before you go to roost. The place swarms with cracksmen, and one can't be too cautious. Lucky dog, you, to have nothing to be robbed of!"

Beck winced at that last remark. Grabman did not seem to notice his confusion, and proceeded, as he put on his stockings, "And Beck, you are a good fellow, and have served me faithfully; when I come back, I will bring you something handsome—a backey-box—or, who knows? a beautiful silver watch. Meanwhile, I think—let me see—yes, I *can* give you this elegant pair of small-clothes. Put out my best—the black ones. And now, Beck, I'll not keep you any longer."

The poor sweep, with many pulls at his forelock, acknowledged the munificent donation, and having finished all his preparations, hastened first to his room, to examine at leisure, and with great admiration, the drab small-clothes. *Room*, indeed, we can scarcely style the wretched inclosure which Beck called his own. It was at the top of the house, under the roof, and hot—oh, so hot, in the summer! It had one small begrimed window, through which the light of heaven never came, for the parapet, beneath which ran the choked gutter, prevented that. But the rain and the wind came in. So sometimes, through four glassless frames, came

a fugitive tom-cat. As for the rats, they held the place as their own. Accustomed to Beck, they cared nothing for him. They were the Mayors of that Palace—he only *le roi fainéant.* They ran over his bed at night: he often felt them on his face, and was convinced they would have eaten him, if there had been anything worth eating upon his bones; still, perhaps out of precaution rather than charity, he generally left them a potato or two, or a crust of bread, to take off the edge of their appetites. But Beck was far better off than most who occupied the various settlements in that Alsatia—he had his room to himself. That was necessary to his sole luxury—the inspection of his treasury, the safety of his mattress; for it he paid, without grumbling, what he thought was a very high rent. To this hole in the roof there was no lock, —for a very good reason, there was no door to it. You went up a ladder, as you would go into a loft. Now, it had often been matter of much intense cogitation to Beck, whether or not he should have a door to this chamber: and the result of the cogitation was invariably the same—he dared not! What should he want with a door—a door with a lock to it? for one followed as a consequence to the other. Such a novel piece of grandeur would be an ostentatious advertisement that he had something to guard. He could have no pretence for it on the ground that he was intruded on by neighbours; no step but his own was ever caught by him ascending that ladder; it led to no other room. All the offices required for the lodgment he performed himself. His supposed poverty was a better safeguard than doors of iron. Besides this, a door, if dangerous, would be superfluous; the moment it was suspected that Beck had something worth guarding, that moment all the picklocks and skeleton keys in the neighbourhood would be in a jingle. And a cracksman of high repute lodged already on the ground-floor. So Beck's treasure, like the bird's-nest, was deposited as much out of sight as his instinct could contrive; and the locks and bolts of civilised men were equally dispensed with by bird and Beck.

On a rusty nail the sweep suspended the drab small-

clothes, stroked them down lovingly, and murmured, "They be's too good for I—I should like to pop 'em! But vouldn't that be a shame? Beck, ben't you be a hungrateful beast to go for to think of nothin' but the tin, ven your 'art ought to varm with hemotion? I vill vear 'em ven I vaits on him. Ven he sees his own smalls bringing in the muffins, he will say, 'Beck, you becomes 'em!'"

Fraught with this noble resolution, the sweep caught up his broom, crept down the ladder, and, with a furtive glance at the door of the room in which the cracksman lived, let himself out, and shambled his way to his crossing. Grabman, in the meanwhile, dressed himself with more care than usual, shaved his beard from a four days' crop, and while seated at his breakfast, read attentively over the notes which Varney had left to him, pausing at times to make his own pencil memoranda. He then packed up such few articles as so moderate a worshipper of the Graces might require, deposited them in an old blue brief-bag; and this done, he opened his door, and creeping to the threshold listened carefully. Below, a few sounds might be heard; here, the wail of a child—there, the shrill scold of a woman, in that accent above all others adapted to scold—the Irish. Farther down still, the deep bass oath of the choleric Resurrection-man; but above, all was silent. Only one floor intervened between Grabman's apartment and the ladder that led to Beck's loft. And the inmates of that room gave no sound of life. Grabman took courage, and shuffling off his shoes, ascended the stairs; he passed the closed door of the room above—he seized the ladder with a shaking hand—he mounted,—step after step —he stood in Beck's room.

Now, O Nicholas Grabman, some moralists may be harsh enough to condemn thee for what thou art doing: kneeling yonder in the dim light, by that curtainless pallet, with greedy fingers feeling here and there, and a placid, self-hugging smile upon thy pale lips. That poor vagabond, whom thou art about to despoil, has served thee well and faithfully, has borne with thine ill-humours, thy sarcasms, thy swearings, thy kicks and buffets—often, when in the bestial sleep of drunkenness, he

has found thee stretched helpless on thy floor, with a kindly hand he has moved away the sharp fender, too near that knavish head, now bent on his ruin; or closed the open window, lest the keen air, that thy breath tainted, should visit thee with rheum and fever. Small has been his guerdon for uncomplaining sacrifice of the few hours spared to this weary drudge from his daily toil — small, but gratefully received. And if Beck had been taught to pray, he would have prayed for thee as for a good man, O miserable sinner! And thou art going now, Nicholas Grabman, upon an enterprise which promises thee large gains, and thy purse is filled; and thou wantest nothing for thy wants, or thy swinish luxuries. Why should those shaking fingers itch for the poor beggar-man's hoards?

But hadst thou been bound on an errand that would have given thee a million, thou wouldst not have left unrifled that secret store which thy prying eye had discovered, and thy hungry heart had coveted. No; since one night, fatal, alas! to the owner of loft and treasure, when, needing Beck for some service, and fearing to call aloud (for the Resurrection-man in the floor below thee, whose oaths even now ascend to thine ear, sleeps ill, and has threatened to make thee mute for ever if thou disturbest him in the few nights in which his dismal calling suffers him to sleep at all)—thou didst creep up the ladder, and didst see the unconscious miser at his nightly work, and after the sight didst steal down again, smiling—no; since that night, no schoolboy ever more rootedly and ruthlessly set his mind upon nest of linnet than thine was set upon the stores in Beck's mattress.

And yet why, O lawyer, should rigid moralists blame thee more than such of thy tribe as live honoured and respectable, upon the frail and the poor? Who among them ever left loft or mattress while a rap could be wrung from either? Matters it to Astræa, whether the spoliation be made, thus nakedly and briefly, or by all the acknowledged forms in which item on item, six-and-eightpence on six-and-eightpence, the inexorable hand closes, at length, on the last farthing of duped despair? Not — Heaven forbid! — that we make thee, foul

Nicholas Grabman, a type for all the class called attorneys-at-law! Noble hearts, liberal minds, are there amongst that brotherhood, we know, and have experienced; but a type art thou of those whom want, and error, and need have proved —alas, too well—the lawyers of the poor. And even while we write, and even while ye read, many a Grabman steals from helpless toil the savings of a life.

Ye poor hoards—darling delights of your otherwise joyless owner—how easily has his very fondness made ye the prey of the spoiler! How gleefully when the pence swelled into a shilling have they been exchanged into the new bright piece of silver, the newest and brightest that could be got; then the shillings into crowns, then the crowns into gold—got slily and at a distance, and contemplated with what rapture!—so that, at last, the total lay manageable and light in its radiant compass. And what a total!—what a surprise to Grabman! Had it been but a sixpence, he would have taken it; but to grasp sovereigns, by the handful, it was too much for him; and, as he rose, he positively laughed, from a sense of fun.

But amongst his booty, there was found one thing that specially moved his mirth—it was a child's coral, with its little bells. Who could have given Beck such a bauble—or how Beck could have refrained from turning it into money, would have been a fit matter for speculation. But it was not that at which Grabman chuckled; he laughed, first, because it was an emblem of the utter childishness and folly of the creature he was leaving penniless; and, secondly, because it furnished his ready wit with a capital contrivance to shift Beck's indignation from his own shoulders to a party more liable to suspicion. He left the coral on the floor near the bed, stole down the ladder, reached his own room, took up his brief-bag, locked his door, slipped the key in the rat-hole, where the trusty, plundered Beck alone could find it, and went boldly down stairs; passing successively the doors, within which still stormed the Resurrection-man, still wailed the child, still shrieked the Irish shrew; he paused at the ground-floor occupied by Bill the cracksman, and his long-fingered, slender, quick-eyed

imps, trained already to pass through broken window-panes, on their precocious progress to the hulks.

The door was open, and gave a pleasant sight of the worthy family within. Bill, himself, a stout-looking fellow, with a florid, jolly countenance, and a pipe in his mouth, was sitting at his window, with his brawny legs lolling on a table covered with the remains of a very tolerable breakfast. Four small Bills were employed in certain sports, which no doubt, according to the fashionable mode of education, instilled useful lessons under the artful guise of playful amusement. Against the wall, at one corner of the room, was affixed a row of bells, from which were suspended exceedingly tempting apples by slender wires. Two of the boys were engaged in the innocent entertainment of extricating the apples without occasioning any alarm from the bells; a third was amusing himself at a table, covered with mock rings and trinkets, in a way that seemed really surprising; with the end of a finger dipped probably in some glutinous matter, he just touched one of the gewgaws, and lo! it vanished!—vanished so magically, that the quickest eye could scarcely trace whither; sometimes up a cuff, sometimes into a shoe—here, there, anywhere—except back again upon the table. The fourth, an urchin apparently about five years old—he might be much younger, judging from his stunted size; somewhat older, judging from the vicious acuteness of his face—on the floor under his father's chair, was diving his little hand into the paternal pockets in search for a marble, sportively hidden in those capacious recesses. On the rising geniuses around him Bill the cracksman looked, and his father's heart was proud.

Pausing at the threshold, Grabman looked in, and said, cheerfully, "Good day to you—good day to you all, my little dears."

"Ah, Grabman" said Bill, rising, and making a bow, for Bill valued himself much on his politeness—"come to blow a cloud, eh? Bob" (this to the eldest born), "manners, sir; wipe your nose, and set a chair for the gent."

"Many thanks to you, Bill, but I can't stay now—I have a long journey to take. But, bless my soul, how stupid I am! I have forgotten my clothes-brush. I knew there was something

on my mind all the way I was coming down stairs. I was saying, 'Grabman, there is something forgotten!'"

"I know what that 'ere feelin' is," said Bill, thoughtfully; "I had it myself the night afore last; and sure enough when I got to the—— but that's neither here nor there. Bob, run up stairs, and fetch down Mr. Grabman's clothes-brush. 'Tis the least you can do for a gent who saved your father from the fate of them 'ere innocent apples,—your fist, Grabman. I have a heart in my buzzom; cut me open, and you will find there '*Halibi*, and Grabman!' Give Bob your key."

"The brush is not in my room," answered Grabman; "it is at the top of the house up the ladder, in Beck's loft—Beck, the sweeper. The stupid dog always keeps it there, and forgot to give it me. Sorry to occasion my friend Bob so much trouble."

"Bob has a soul above trouble; his father's heart beats in his buzzom. Bob, track the dancers. Up like a lark—and down like a dump."

Bob grinned, made a mow at Mr. Grabman, and scampered up the stairs.

"You never attends our free-and-easy," said Bill; "but we toasts you, with three times three, and up standing. 'Tis a hungrateful world! But some men has a heart; and, to those who has a heart, Grabman is a trump!"

"I am sure, whenever I can do you a service, you may reckon on me. Meanwhile, if you could get that cursed bullying fellow who lives under me to be a little more civil, you would oblige me."

"Under you? No 7? No. 7—is it? Grabman, h-am I a man? Is this a h-arm, and this a bunch of fives? I dares do all that does become a man; but No. 7 is a body-snatcher! No 7 has bullied me—and I bore it! No. 7 might whop me—and this h-arm would let him whop! He lives with graves, and churchyards, and stiff 'uns—that damnable No. 7! Ask some'at else, Grabman. I dares not touch No. 7 any more than the ghostesses."

Grabman sneered as he saw that Bill, stout rogue as he was, turned pale while he spoke; but at that moment Bob reappeared with the clothes-brush, which the ex-attorney thrust into his

pocket; and shaking Bill by the hand, and patting Bob on the head, he set out on his journey.

Bill reseated himself, muttering, "Bully a body-snatcher! 'drot that Grabman, does he want to get rid of poor Bill?"

Meanwhile Bob exhibited slily, to his second brother, the sight of Beck's stolen coral. The children took care not to show it to their father. They were already inspired by the laudable ambition to set up in business on their own account.

CHAPTER VIII.

PERCIVAL VISITS LUCRETIA.

HAVING once ascertained the house in which Helen lived, it was no difficult matter for St. John to learn the name of the guardian whom Beck had supposed to be her mother. No common delight mingled with Percival's amaze, when in that name he recognised one borne by his own kinswoman. Very little indeed of the family history was known to him. Neither his father nor his mother ever willingly conversed of the fallen heiress—it was a subject which the children had felt to be proscribed; but in the neighbourhood, Percival had, of course, heard some mention of Lucretia, as the haughty and accomplished Miss Clavering—who had, to the astonishment of all stooped to a *mésalliance* with her uncle's French librarian. That her loss of the St. John property, the succession of Percival's father, were unexpected by the villagers and squires around, and perhaps set down to the caprice of Sir Miles, or to an intellect impaired by apoplectic attacks, it was not likely that he should have heard. The rich have the polish of their education, and the poor that instinctive tact, so wonderful amongst the agricultural peasantry, to prevent such unmannerly disclosures or unwelcome hints; and, both by rich and poor, the Vernon St. Johns were too popular and respected for wanton allusions to subjects calculated to pain them All, therefore, that Percival knew of his relation, was that she had resided from infancy with Sir Miles; that after

their uncle's death, she had married an inferior in rank, of the name of Dalibard, and settled abroad; that she was a person of peculiar manners; and, he had heard somewhere, of rare gifts. He had been unable to learn the name of the young lady staying with Madame Dalibard; he had learned only that she went by some other name, and was not the daughter of the lady who rented the house. Certainly, it was possible that this last might not be his kinswoman, after all. The name, though strange to English ears, and not common in France, was no sufficient warrant for Percival's high spirits at the thought that he had now won legitimate and regular access to the house—still it allowed him to call; it furnished a fair excuse for a visit.

How long he was at his toilet that day, poor boy! How sedulously, with comb and brush, he sought to smooth into straight precision that luxuriant labyrinth of jetty curls, which had never cost him a thought before! Gil Blas says that the toilet is a pleasure to the young, though a labour to the old; Percival St. John's toilet was no pleasure to him that anxious morning.

At last, he tore himself, dissatisfied and desperate, from the glass, caught his hat and his whip, threw himself on his horse, and rode, at first very fast and at last very slowly, to the old, decayed, shabby, neglected house, that lay hid, like the poverty of fallen pride, amidst the trim villas and smart cottages of fair and flourishing Brompton.

The same servant who had opened the gate to Ardworth appeared to his summons, and, after eying him for some moments with a listless, stupid stare, said, "You'll be after some mistake!" and turned away.

"Stop—stop!" cried Percival, trying to intrude himself through the gate; but the servant blocked up the entrance sturdily. "It is no mistake at all, my good lady. I have come to see Madame Dalibard, my—my relation!"

"Your relation!" and again the woman stared at Percival with a look through the dull vacancy of which some distrust was dimly perceptible. "Bide a bit there, and give us your name."

Percival gave his card to the servant, with his sweetest and most persuasive smile. She took it with one hand, and, with the other, turned the key in the gate, leaving Percival outside. It was five minutes before she returned, and she then, with the same prim, smileless expression of countenance, opened the gate, and motioned him to follow.

The kind-hearted boy sighed as he cast a glance at the desolate and poverty-stricken appearance of the house, and thought within himself—"Ah, pray Heaven she may be my relation, and then I shall have the right to find her and that sweet girl a very different home!" The old woman threw open the drawing-room door, and Percival was in the presence of his deadliest foe! The armchair was turned towards the entrance, and from amidst the coverings that hid the form, the remarkable countenance of Madame Dalibard emerged, sharp and earnest, directly fronting the intruder.

"So," she said slowly, and, as it were, devouring him with her keen, steadfast eyes—"so you are Percival St. John! Welcome! I did not know that we should ever meet. I have not sought you—you seek me! Strange—yes, strange—that the young and the rich should seek the suffering and the poor!"

Surprised and embarrassed by this singular greeting, Percival halted abruptly in the middle of the room; and there was something inexpressibly winning in his shy, yet graceful confusion. It seemed, with silent eloquence, to apologise and to deprecate. And when, in his silvery voice, scarcely yet tuned to the fulness of manhood, he said, feelingly, "Forgive me, madam, but my mother is not in England,"—the excuse evinced such delicacy of idea, so exquisite a sense of high breeding, that the calm assurance of worldly ease could not have more attested the chivalry of the native gentleman.

"I have nothing to forgive, Mr. St. John," said Lucretia, with a softened manner. "Pardon me rather that my infirmities do not allow me to rise to receive you. This seat,—here,—next to me. You have a strong likeness to your father."

Percival received this last remark as a compliment, and bowed. Then, as he lifted his ingenuous brow, he took, for the first time, a steady view of his new-found relation. The peculiarities of Lucretia's countenance in youth had naturally deepened with middle age. The contour, always too sharp and pronounced, was now strong and bony as a man's: the line between the eyebrows was hollowed into a furrow. The eye retained its old uneasy, sinister, sidelong glance; or, at rare moments (as when Percival entered), its searching penetration and assured command; but the eyelids themselves, red and injected, as with grief or vigil, gave something haggard and wild, whether to glance or gaze. Despite the paralysis of the frame, the face, though pale and thin, showed no bodily decay. A vigour, surpassing the strength of woman, might still be seen in the play of the bold muscles, the firmness of the contracted lips. What physicians call "*vitality*," and trace at once (if experienced) on the physiognomy, as the prognostic of long life, undulated restlessly in every aspect of the face, every movement of those thin nervous hands, which, contrasting the rest of that motionless form, never seemed to be at rest. The teeth were still white and regular, as in youth; and when they shone out in speaking, gave a strange, unnatural freshness to a face otherwise so worn.

As Percival gazed, and, while gazing, saw those wandering eyes bent down, and yet *felt* they watched him, a thrill, almost of fear, shot through his heart. Nevertheless, so much more impressionable was he to charitable and trustful than to suspicious and timid emotions, that, when Madame Dalibard, suddenly looking up, and shaking her head gently, said—

"You see but a sad wreck, young kinsman," all those instincts, which nature itself seemed to dictate for self-preservation, vanished into heavenly tenderness and pity.

"Ah!" he said, rising and pressing one of those deadly hands in both his own, while tears rose to his eyes. "Ah! since you call me kinsman, I have all a kinsman's privileges. You must have the best advice—the most skilful surgeons. Oh, you will recover—you must not despond."

Lucretia's lips moved uneasily. This kindness took her

by surprise. She turned desperately away from the human gleam that shot across the sevenfold gloom of her soul: "Do not think of me," she said, with a forced smile: "it is my peculiarity not to like allusion to myself, though this time I provoked it. Speak to me of the old cedar trees at Laughton—do they stand still? You are the master of Laughton now!—it is a noble heritage!"

Then, St. John, thinking to please her, talked of the old manor-house, described the improvements made by his father, spoke gaily of those which he himself contemplated; and as he ran on, Lucretia's brow, a moment ruffled, grew smooth and smoother, and the gloom settled back upon her soul.

All at once she interrupted him. "How did you discover me—was it through Mr. Varney? I bade him not mention me—yet how else could you learn?" As she spoke, there was an anxious trouble in her tone, which increased, while she observed that St. John looked confused.

"Why," he began, hesitatingly, and brushing his hat with his hand; "why—perhaps you may have heard from the—that is—I think there is a young——. Ah, it is you—it is you! I see you once again!" And springing up, he was at the side of Helen, who at that instant had entered the room, and now, her eyes downcast, her cheeks blushing, her breast gently heaving,—heard, but answered not that passionate burst of joy.

Startled, Madame Dalibard (her hands firmly grasping the sides of her chair) contemplated the two. She had heard nothing, guessed nothing of their former meeting. All that had passed before between them was unknown to her. Yet there was evidence unmistakable, conclusive—the son of her despoiler loved the daughter of her rival, and—if the virgin heart speaks by the outward sign—those downcast eyes, those blushing cheeks, that heaving breast, told that he did not love in vain!

Before her lurid and murderous gaze, as if to defy her, the two inheritors of a revenge unglutted by the grave—stood, united mysteriously together. Up, from the vast ocean of her

hate, rose that poor isle of love; there, unconscious of the horror around them—the victims found their footing! How beautiful at that hour their youth—their very ignorance of their own emotions—their innocent gladness—their sweet trouble! The fell gazer drew a long breath of fiendlike complacency and glee, and her hands opened wide, and then slowly closed, as if she felt them in her grasp.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ROSE BENEATH THE UPAS.

AND from that day, Percival had his privileged entry into Madame Dalibard's house. The little narrative of the circumstances connected with his first meeting with Helen, partly drawn from Percival, partly afterwards from Helen (with blushing and faltered excuses from the latter for not having mentioned before an incident that might, perhaps needlessly, vex or alarm her aunt in so delicate a state of health), was received by Lucretia with rare graciousness. The connection, not only between herself and Percival, but between Percival and Helen, was allowed and even dwelt upon by Madame Dalibard, as a natural reason for permitting the artless intimacy which immediately sprang up between these young persons. She permitted Percival to call daily, to remain for hours, to share in their simple meals, to wander alone with Helen in the garden, assist her to bind up the ragged flowers, and sit by her in the old ivy-grown arbour, when their work was done. She affected to look upon them both as children, and to leave to them that happy familiarity which childhood only sanctions, and compared to which, the affection of maturer years seems at once coarse and cold.

As they grew more familiar, the differences and similarities in their characters came out, and nothing more delightful than the harmony into which even the contrasts blended ever invited the guardian angel to pause and smile. As flowers in some trained

parterre relieve each other, now softening, now heightening each several hue, till all unite in one concord of interwoven beauty, so these two blooming natures, brought together, seemed, where varying still, to melt and fuse their affluences into one wealth of innocence and sweetness. Both had a native buoyancy and cheerfulness of spirit, a noble trustfulness in others, a singular candour and freshness of mind and feeling. But beneath the gaiety of Helen there was a soft and holy under-stream of thoughtful melancholy, a high and religious sentiment, that vibrated more exquisitely to the subtle mysteries of creation—the solemn unison between the bright world without, and the grave destinies of that world within (which is an imperishable soul), than the lighter and more vivid youthfulness of Percival had yet conceived. In him, lay the germs of the active mortal, who might win distinction in the bold career we run upon the surface of the earth. In her, there was that finer and more spiritual essence which lifts the poet to the golden atmosphere of dreams, and reveals in glimpses to the saint the choral Populace of Heaven. We do not say that Helen would ever have found the utterance of the poet, that her reveries, undefined and unanalysed, could have taken the sharp clear form of words. For to the poet practically developed and made manifest to the world, many other gifts, besides the mere poetic sense, are needed; stern study, and logical generalisation of scattered truths, and patient observation of the characters of men, and the wisdom that comes from sorrow and passion, and a sage's experience of things actual, embracing the dark secrets of human infirmity and crime. But, despite all that has been said in disparagement or disbelief of "mute inglorious Miltons," we maintain that there are natures in which the divinest element of poetry exists, the purer and more delicate for escaping from bodily form, and evaporating from the coarser vessels into which the poet, so called, must pour the ethereal fluid. There is a certain virtue within us, comprehending our subtlest and noblest emotions, which is poetry while untold, and grows pale and poor in proportion as we strain it into poems. Nay, it may be said of this airy property of our inmost being, that, more or less, it departs from us, according as we give it forth

into the world, even, as only by the loss of its particles, the rose wastes its perfume on the air. So this more spiritual sensibility dwelt in Helen, as the latent mesmerism in water, as the invisible fairy in an enchanted ring. It was an essence or divinity, shrined and shrouded in herself, which gave her more intimate and vital union with all the influences of the universe, a companion to her loneliness, an angel hymning low to her own listening soul. This made her enjoyment of Nature, in its merest trifles, exquisite and profound: this gave to her tenderness of heart all the delicious and sportive variety love borrows from imagination; this lifted her piety above the mere forms of conventional religion, and breathed into her prayers the ecstasy of the saint.

But Helen was not the less filled with the sweet humanities of her age and sex, her very gravity was tinged with rosy light, as a western cloud with the sun. She had sportiveness, and caprice, and even whim, as the butterfly, though the emblem of the soul, still flutters wantonly over every wild flower, and expands its glowing wings on the sides of the beaten road. And with a sense of weakness in the common world (growing out of her very strength in nobler atmospheres), she leaned the more trustfully on the strong arm of her young adorer; not fancying that the difference between them arose from superiority in her,—but rather as a bird, once tamed, flies at the sight of the hawk to the breast of its owner; so from each airy flight into the loftier heaven, let but the thought of danger daunt her wing, and, as in a more powerful nature, she took refuge on that fostering heart.

The love between these children, for so, if not literally in years, in their newness to all that steals the freshness and the dew from maturer life, they may be rightly called, was such as befitted those whose souls have not forfeited the Eden. It was more like the love of fairies than of human beings. They showed it to each other, innocently and frankly; yet of love as we of the grosser creation call it, with its impatient pains, and burning hopes, they never spoke nor dreamed. It was an unutterable, ecstatic fondness—a clinging to each other—in thought, desire, and heart—a joy more than mortal in each

other's presence; yet, in parting, not that idle and empty sorrow which unfits the weak for the homelier demands on time and life. And this, because of the wondrous trust in themselves, and in the future, which made a main part of their credulous, happy natures. Neither felt fear nor jealousy —or if jealousy came, it was the pretty, childlike jealousies which have no sting—of the bird, if Helen listened to its note too long—of the flower, if Percival left Helen's side too quickly to tie up its drooping petals, or refresh its dusty leaves. Close by the stir of the great city, with all its fret and chafe, and storm of life—in the desolate garden of that sombre house, and under the withering eyes of relentless Crime, revived the Arcady of old—the scene vocal to the reeds of idyllist and shepherd: and in the midst of the iron Tragedy, harmlessly and unconsciously arose the strain of the Pastoral Music.

It would be a vain effort to describe the state of Lucretia's mind while she watched the progress of the affection she had favoured, and gazed on the spectacle of the fearless happiness she had promoted. The image of a felicity at once so great and so holy wore to her gloomy sight the aspect of a mocking Fury. It rose in contrast to her own ghastly and crime-stained life; it did not upbraid her conscience with guilt so loudly as it scoffed at her intellect for folly. These children, playing on the verge of life, how much more of life's true secret did they already know than she, with all her vast native powers and wasted realms of blackened and charred experience! For what had she studied, and schemed, and calculated, and toiled, and sinned? As a conqueror stricken unto death would render up all the regions vanquished by his sword for one drop of water to his burning lips, how gladly would she have given all the knowledge bought with blood and fire, to feel one moment as those children felt! Then, from out her silent and grim despair, stood forth, fierce and prominent, the great fiend, Revenge.

By a monomania, not uncommon to those who have made *self* the centre of being, Lucretia referred to her own sullen history of wrong and passion all that bore analogy to it, however distant. She had never been enabled, without an intolerable pang of hate and envy, to contemplate courtship and love in

others. From the rudest shape to the most refined, that master-passion in the existence, at least, of woman,—reminding her of her own brief episode of human tenderness and devotion, opened every wound, and wrung every fibre of a heart that, while crime had indurated it to most emotions, memory still left morbidly sensitive to one. But if tortured by the sight of love in those who had had no connection with her fate,—who stood apart from her lurid orbit, and were gazed upon only afar (as a lost soul, from the abyss, sees the gleam of angels' wings within some planet it never has explored), how ineffably more fierce and intolerable was the wrath that seized her, when, in her haunted imagination, she saw all Susan's rapture at the vows of Mainwaring mantling in Helen's face! All that might have disarmed a heart as hard, but less diseased, less preoccupied by revenge, only irritated more the consuming hate of that inexorable spirit. Helen's seraphic purity,—her exquisite overflowing kindness, ever forgetting self—her airy cheerfulness,—even her very moods of melancholy, calm and seemingly causeless as they were, perpetually galled and blistered that writhing, preternatural susceptibility which is formed by the consciousness of infamy, the dreary egotism of one cut off from the charities of the world,—with whom all mirth is sardonic convulsion, all sadness, rayless and unresigned despair.

Of the two, Percival inspired her with feelings the most akin to humanity. For him, despite her bitter memories of his father, she felt something of compassion, and shrank from the touch of his frank hand in remorse. She had often need to whisper to herself that his life was an obstacle to the heritage of the son, of whom, as we have seen, she was in search, and whom, indeed, she believed she had already found in John Ardworth; that it was not in wrath and in vengeance that *this* victim was to be swept into the grave, but as an indispensable sacrifice to a cherished object—a determined policy. As, in the studies of her youth, she had adopted the Machiavelism of ancient statecraft as a rule admissible in private life, so she seemed scarcely to admit as a crime that which was but the removal of a barrier between her aim and her end. Before she had become personally acquainted with Percival, she had rejected all occasion to know

him. She had suffered Varney to call upon him as the old *protégé* of Sir Miles, and to wind into his intimacy, meaning to leave to her accomplice, when the hour should arrive, the dread task of destruction. This not from cowardice, for Gabriel had once rightly described her when he said, that "if she lived with shadows she could quell them," but simply because, more intellectually unsparing than constitutionally cruel (save where the old vindictive memories thoroughly unsexed her), this was a victim whose pangs she desired not to witness, over whose fate it was no luxury to gloat and revel. She wished not to see nor to know him *living*, only to learn that he was no more, and that Helen alone stood between Laughton and her son. Now that he had himself, as if with predestined feet, crossed her threshold,—that he, like Helen, had delivered himself into her toils, the hideous guilt, before removed from her hands, became haunting, fronted her face to face, and filled her with a superstitious awe.

Meanwhile, her outward manner to both her meditated victims, if moody and fitful at times, was not such as would have provoked suspicion even in less credulous hearts. From the first entry of Helen under her roof, she had been formal and measured in her welcome,— kept her, as it were, aloof, and affected no prodigal superfluity of dissimulation; but she had never been positively harsh or unkind in word or in deed, and had coldly excused herself for the repulsiveness of her manner.

"I am irritable," she said, "from long suffering; I am unsocial from habitual solitude; do not expect from me the fondness and warmth that should belong to our relationship. Do not harass yourself with vain solicitude for one whom all seeming attention but reminds more painfully of infirmity, and who, even thus stricken down, would be independent of all cares not bought and paid for. Be satisfied to live here in all reasonable liberty, to follow your own habits and caprices uncontrolled. Regard me but as a piece of necessary furniture. You can never displease me, but when you notice that I live and suffer."

If Helen wept bitterly at these hard words when first spoken, it was not with anger that her loving heart was so thrown back

upon herself. On the contrary, she became inspired with a compassion so great, that it took the character of reverence. She regarded this very coldness as a mournful dignity. She felt grateful that one who could thus dispense with, should yet have sought her. She had heard her mother say that "she had been under great obligations to Lucretia;" and now, when she was forbidden to repay them, even by a kiss on those weary eyelids, a daughter's hand to that sleepless pillow; when she saw that the barrier first imposed was irremovable, —that no time diminished the distance her aunt set between them,—that the least approach to the tenderness of service beyond the most casual offices, really seemed but to fret those excitable nerves, and fever the hand that she ventured timorously to clasp; she retreated into herself with a sad amaze that increased her pity and heightened her respect. To her, love seemed so necessary a thing in the helplessness of human life, even when blessed with health and youth, that this rejection of all love in one so bowed and crippled, struck her imagination as something sublime in its dreary grandeur and stoic pride of independence. She regarded it as of old a tender and pious nun would have regarded the asceticism of some sanctified recluse—as Teresa (had she lived in the same age) might have regarded St. Simeon Stylites existing aloft from human sympathy on the roofless summit of his column of stone: and with this feeling she sought to inspire Percival. He had the heart to enter into her compassion, but not the imagination to sympathise with her reverence. Even the repugnant awe that he had first conceived for Madame Dalibard, so bold was he by temperament, he had long since cast off; he recognised only the moroseness and petulance of an habitual invalid, and shook playfully his glossy curls, when Helen, with her sweet seriousness, insisted on his recognising more.

To this house few, indeed, were the visitors admitted. The Mivers's, whom the benevolent officiousness of Mr. Fielden had originally sent thither to see their young kinswoman, now and then came to press Helen to join some party to the theatre, or Vauxhall, or a pic-nic in Richmond Park;

but when they found their overtures, which had at first been politely accepted by Madame Dalibard, were rejected, they gadually ceased their visits, wounded and indignant.

Certain it was, that Lucretia had, at one time, eagerly caught at their well-meant civilities to Helen—*now* she as abruptly declined them. Why? It would be hard to plumb into all the black secrets of that heart. It would have been but natural to her, who shrank from dooming Helen to no worse calamity than a virgin's grave, to have designed to throw her into such uncongenial guidance, amidst all the manifold temptations of the corrupt city—to have suffered her to be seen, and to be ensnared by those gallants ever on the watch for defenceless beauty; and to contrast with their elegance of mien, and fatal flatteries—the grossness of the companions selected for her, and the unloving discomfort of the home into which she had been thrown. But now that St. John had appeared—that Helen's heart and fancy were steeled alike against more dangerous temptation,—the object to be obtained from the pressing courtesy of Mrs. Mivers existed no more. The vengeance flowed into other channels.

The only other visitors at the house were John Ardworth and Gabriel Varney.

Madame Dalibard watched vigilantly the countenance and manner of Ardworth, when, after presenting him to Percival, she whispered,—"I am glad you assured me as to your sentiments for Helen. She has found *there*, the lover you wished for her—'gay and handsome as herself.'"

And, in the sudden paleness that overspread Ardworth's face, in his comprest lips, and convulsive start, she read with unspeakable rage the untold secret of his heart—till the rage gave way to complacency at the thought that the last insult to her wrongs was spared her—that her son (as son she believed he was) could not now, at least, be the successful suitor of her loathed sister's loathed child. Her discovery, perhaps, confirmed her in her countenance to Percival's progressive wooing, and half reconciled her to the pangs it inflicted on herself.

At the first introduction Ardworth had scarcely glanced

at Percival. He regarded him but as the sleek flutterer in the sunshine of fortune. And for the idle, the gay, the fair, the well-dressed, and wealthy—the sturdy workman of his own rough way, felt something of the uncharitable disdain which the laborious *have nots* too usually entertain for the prosperous *haves*. But the moment the unwelcome intelligence of Madame Dalibard was conveyed to him, the smooth-faced boy swelled into dignity and importance.

Yet it was not merely as a rival that that strong manly heart, after the first natural agony, regarded Percival. No, he looked upon him less with anger than with interest—as the one in whom Helen's happiness was henceforth to be invested. And to Madame Dalibard's astonishment, for this nature was wholly new to her experience, she saw him, even in that first interview, composing his rough face to smiles, smoothing his bluff imperious accents into courtesy, listening patiently, watching benignly, and at last thrusting his large hand frankly forth—griping Percival's slender fingers in his own; and then, with an indistinct chuckle, that seemed half laugh and half groan, as if he did not dare to trust himself farther, he made his wonted unceremonious nod, and strode hurriedly from the room.

But he came again and again, almost daily, for about a fortnight; sometimes, without entering the house, he would join the young people in the garden, assist them with awkward hands in their playful work on the garden, or sit with them in the ivied bower; and, warming more and more each time he came, talk at last with the cordial frankness of an elder brother. There was no disguise in this—he began to love Percival—what would seem more strange to the superficial, to admire him. Genius has a quick perception of the moral qualities; genius which, differing thus from mere talent, is more allied to the heart than to the head, sympathises genially with goodness. Ardworth respected that young, ingenuous, unpolluted mind: he himself felt better and purer in its atmosphere. Much of the affection he cherished for Helen passed thus beautifully and nobly into his sentiments for the one whom Helen not unworthily preferred. And they

grew so fond of him! as the young and gentle ever will grow fond of genius—however rough—once admitted to its companionship!

Percival, by this time, had recalled to his mind where he had first seen that strong-featured dark-browed countenance, and he gaily reminded Ardworth of his discourtesy, on the brow of the hill which commanded the view of London. That reminiscence made his new friend writhe; for then, amidst all his ambitious visions of the future, he had seen Helen in the distance—the reward of every labour—the fairest star in his horizon. But he strove stoutly against the regret of the illusion lost; the *vivendi causæ* were left him still, and for the nymph that had glided from his clasp, he clung at least to the laurel that was left in her place. In the folds of his robust fortitude, Ardworth thus wrapped his secret. Neither of his young playmates suspected it. He would have disdained himself if he had so poisoned their pleasure. That he suffered when alone, much and bitterly, is not to be denied; but in that masculine and complete being, Love took but its legitimate rank, amidst the passions and cares of man. It soured no existence—it broke no heart—the wind swept some blossoms from the bough, and tossed wildly the agitated branches from root to summit, but the trunk stood firm.

In some of these visits to Madame Dalibard's, Ardworth renewed with her the more private conversation which had so unsettled his past convictions as to his birth, and so disturbed the calm, strong currents of his mind. He was chiefly anxious to learn what conjectures Madame Dalibard had formed as to his parentage, and what ground there was for belief that he was near in blood to herself, or that he was born to a station less dependent on continuous exertion; but on these points the dark sibyl preserved an obstinate silence. She was satisfied with the hints she had already thrown out, and absolutely refused to say more till better authorised by the inquiries she had set on foot. Artfully, she turned from these topics of closer and more household interest to those on which she had previously insisted—connected with

the general knowledge of mankind, and the complicated science of practical life. To fire his genius, wing his energies, inflame his ambition above that slow, laborious drudgery to which he had linked the chances of his career, and which her fiery and rapid intellect was wholly unable to comprehend —save as a waste of life for uncertain and distant objects— became her task. And she saw with delight that Ardworth listened to her more assentingly than he had done at first. In truth, the pain shut within his heart, the conflict waged keenly between his reason and his passion, unfitted him, for the time, for mere mechanical employment, in which his genius could afford him no consolation. Now, genius is given to man, not only to enlighten others, but to comfort as well as to elevate himself. Thus, in all the sorrows of actual existence, the man is doubly inclined to turn to his genius for distraction. Harassed in this world of action, he knocks at the gate of that world of idea or fancy which he is privileged to enter: he escapes from the clay to the spirit. And rarely, till some great grief comes, does the man in whom the celestial fire is lodged know all the gift of which he is possessed. At last, Ardworth's visits ceased abruptly. He shut himself up once more in his chambers; but the law books were laid aside.

Varney, who generally contrived to call when Ardworth was not there, seldom interrupted the lovers in their little paradise of the garden; but he took occasion to ripen and cement his intimacy with Percival: sometimes he walked (or if St. John had his cabriolet) drove home and dined with him, *tête-à-tete*, in Curzon Street; and as he made Helen his chief subject of conversation, Percival could not but esteem him amongst the most agreeable of men. With Helen, when Percival was not there, Varney held some secret conferences—secret even from Percival; two or three times, before the hour in which Percival was accustomed to come, they had been out together; and Helen's face looked more cheerful than usual on their return. It was not surprising that Gabriel Varney, so displeasing to a man like Ardworth, should have won little less favour with Helen than with Percival; for, to say nothing of an ease and suavity of manner which stole into the confidence of those in

whom to confide was a natural propensity, his various acquisitions and talents, imposing, from the surface over which they spread, and the glitter which they made, had an inevitable effect upon a mind so susceptible as Helen's to admiration for art and respect for knowledge. But what chiefly conciliated her to Varney, whom she regarded, moreover, as her aunt's most intimate friend, was that she was persuaded he was unhappy, and wronged by the world or fortune. Varney had a habit of so representing himself—of dwelling with a bitter eloquence—which his natural malignity made forcible—on the injustice of the world to superior intellect. He was a great accuser of Fate. It is the illogical weakness of some evil natures to lay all their crimes, and the consequences of crime, upon *Destiny*. There was a heat, a vigour, a rush of words, and a readiness of strong, if trite, imagery in what Varney said, that deceived the young into the monstrous error that he was an enthusiast—misanthropical, perhaps, but only so from enthusiasm. How could Helen, whose slightest thought, when a star broke forth from the cloud, or a bird sung suddenly from the copse, had more of wisdom and of poetry than all Varney's gaudy and painted seemings ever could even mimic—how *could* she be so deceived? Yet so it was. Here stood a man whose youth she supposed had been devoted to refined and elevating pursuits, gifted, neglected, disappointed, solitary, and unhappy. She saw little beyond. You had but to touch her pity to win her interest, and to excite her trust. Of anything farther, even had Percival never existed, she could not have dreamed. It was because a secret and undefinable repugnance, in the midst of pity, trust and friendship, put Varney altogether out of the light of a possible lover, that all those sentiments were so easily kindled. This repugnance arose not from the disparity between their years; it was rather that nameless uncongeniality which does not forbid friendship, but is irreconcilable with love. To do Varney justice, he never offered to reconcile the two. Not for love did he secretly confer with Helen—not for love did his heart beat against the hand which reposed so carelessly on his murderous arm.

CHAPTER X.

THE RATTLE OF THE SNAKE.

THE progress of affection between natures like those of Percival and Helen, favoured by free and constant intercourse, was naturally rapid. It was scarcely five weeks from the day he had first seen Helen, and he already regarded her as his plighted bride. During the earlier days of his courtship, Percival, enamoured and absorbed for the first time in his life, did not hasten to make his mother the *confidante* of his happiness. He had written but twice; and though he said briefly, in the second letter, that he had discovered two relations, both interesting, and one charming, he had deferred naming them or entering into detail. This, not alone from that indescribable coyness which all have experienced in addressing even those with whom they are most intimate, in the early, half-unrevealed, and mystic emotions of first love; but because Lady Mary's letters had been so full of her sister's declining health, of her own anxieties and fears, that he had shrunk from giving her a new subject of anxiety; and a confidence, full of hope and joy, seemed to him unfeeling and unseasonable. He knew how necessarily uneasy and restless an avowal that his heart was seriously engaged to one she had never seen, would make that tender mother; and that his confession would rather add to her cares, than produce sympathy with his transports. But now feeling impatient for his mother's assent to the formal proposals which had become due to Madame Dalibard and Helen, and taking advantage of the letter last received from her, which gave more cheering accounts of her sister, and expressed curiosity for further explanation as to his half disclosure, he wrote at length, and cleared his breast of all its secrets. It was the same day in which he wrote this confession, and pleaded his cause, that we accompany him to the house of his sweet mistress, and leave him by her side, in the accustomed

garden. Within, Madame Dalibard, whose chair was set by the window, bent over certain letters, which she took, one by one, from her desk, and read slowly, lifting her eyes from time to time and glancing towards the young people, as they walked, hand in hand, round the small demesnes, now hid by the fading foliage, now emerging into view. Those letters were the early love-epistles of William Mainwaring. She had not recurred to them for years. Perhaps she now felt that food necessary to the sustainment of her fiendish designs. It was a strange spectacle, to see this being, so full of vital energy, mobile and restless as a serpent, condemned to that helpless decrepitude, chained to the uneasy seat—not as in the resigned and passive imbecility of extreme age, but rather as one whom, in the prime of life, the rack has broken, leaving the limbs inert, the mind active, the form as one dead, the heart with super-abundant vigour;—a cripple's impotence, and a Titan's will! What, in that dreary imprisonment, and amidst the silence she habitually preserved, passed through the caverns of that breast, one can no more conjecture than one can count the blasts that sweep and rage through the hollows of impenetrable rock, or the elements that conflict in the bosom of the volcano, everlastingly at work. She had read, and replaced the letters, and leaning her cheek on her hand, was gazing vacantly on the wall, when Varney intruded on that dismal solitude.

He closed the door after him with more than usual care; and, drawing a seat close to Lucretia, said, "*Belle mère*, the time has arrived for *you* to act—my part is well-nigh closed."

"Ay!" said Lucretia, wearily; "what is the news you bring?"

"First," replied Varney, and, as he spoke, he shut the window, as if his whisper could possibly be heard without—"first, all this business connected with Helen is at length arranged. You know when, agreeably to your permission, I first suggested to her, as it were casually, that you were so reduced in fortune, that I trembled to regard your future,—that you had years ago sacrificed nearly half your pecuniary resources to maintain her parents—she of herself reminded me that she was entitled, when of age, to a sum far exceeding all her wants, and——"

"That I might be a pensioner on the child of William

Mainwaring and Susan Mivers," interrupted Lucretia. "I know that, and thank her not. Pass on."

"And you know, too, that in the course of my conversation with the girl, I let out also incidentally that, even so, you were dependent on the chances of her life; that if she died (and youth itself is mortal) before she was of age, the sum left her by her grandfather would revert to her father's family: and so, by hints, I drew her on to ask if there was no mode by which, in case of her death, she might insure subsistence to you. So that you see the whole scheme was made at her own prompting. I did but, as a man of business, suggest the means—an insurance on her life."

"Varney, these details are hateful. I do not doubt that you have done all to forestall inquiry and elude risk. The girl has insured her life to the amount of her fortune?"

"To that amount only! Pooh! Her death will buy more than that! As no one single office will insure for more than 5000*l.*, and as it was easy to persuade her that such offices were liable to failure, and that it was usual to insure in several, and for a larger amount than the sum desired, I got her to enter herself at three of the principal offices. The amount paid to us on her death will be fifteen thousand pounds. It will be paid (and here I have followed the best legal advice) in trust to me for your benefit. Hence, therefore, even if our researches fail us, if no son of yours can be found, with sufficient evidence to prove, against the keen interests and bought advocates of heirs-at-law, the right to Laughton, this girl will repay us well, will replace what I have taken, at the risk of my neck, perhaps—certainly at the risk of the hulks, from the capital of my uncle's legacy—will refund what we have spent on the inquiry—and the residue will secure to you an independence, sufficing for your wants almost for life, and to me, what will purchase with economy"—and Varney smiled—"a year or so of a gentleman's idle pleasures. Are you satisfied thus far?"

"She will die happy and innocent!" muttered Lucretia, with the growl of demoniac disappointment.

"Will you wait, then, till my forgery is detected, and I

have no power to buy the silence of the trustees—wait till I am in prison, and on a trial for life and death? Reflect, every day, every hour of delay, is fraught with peril. But if my safety is nothing compared to the refinement of your revenge, will you wait till Helen marries Percival St. John? You start! But can you suppose that this innocent love-play will not pass rapidly to its *dénoûment?* It is but yesterday that Percival confided to me, that he should write this very day to his mother, and communicate all his feelings and his hopes;—that he waited but her assent, to propose formally for Helen. Now one of two things must happen. Either this mother, haughty and vain as lady-mothers mostly are, may refuse consent to her son's marriage with the daughter of a disgraced banker, and the niece of that Lucretia Dalibard whom her husband would not admit beneath his roof——"

"Hold, sir!" exclaimed Lucretia, haughtily, and amidst all the passions that darkened her countenance and degraded her soul, some flash of her ancestral spirit shot across her brow; but it passed quickly, and she added, with fierce composure—"You are right; go on!"

"Either—and pardon me for an insult that comes not from me—either this will be the case; Lady Mary St. John will hasten back in alarm to London; she exercises extraordinary control over her son; she may withdraw him from us altogether, from me as well as you, and the occasion now presented to us may be lost (who knows?) for ever; or she may be a weak and fond woman,—may be detained in Italy by her sister's illness,—may be anxious that the last lineal descendant of the St. Johns should marry betimes; and, moved by her darling's prayers, may consent at once to the union. Or a third course, which Percival thinks the most probable, and which, though most unwelcome to us of all I had well nigh forgotten, may be adopted. She may come to England, and, in order to judge her son's choice with her own eyes, may withdraw Helen from your roof to hers. At all events, delays are dangerous—dangerous, putting aside my personal interest, and regarding only your own object—may bring to our acts new and searching eyes—

may cut us off from the habitual presence either of Percival or Helen, or both: or surround them, at the first breath of illness, with prying friends and formidable precautions. The birds now are in our hands. Why then open the cage and bid them fly, in order to spread the net? This morning all the final documents with the Insurance Companies are completed. It remains for me but to pay the first quarterly premiums. For that I think I am prepared without drawing farther on your hoards or my own scanty resources, which Grabman will take care to drain fast enough."

"And Percival St. John?" said Madame Dalibard. "We want no idle sacrifices. If my son be *not* found, we need not that boy's ghost amongst those who haunt us."

"Surely not," said Varney; "and for my part, he may be more useful to me alive than dead. There is no insurance on *his* life, and a rich friend (credulous greenhorn that he is!) is scarcely of that flock of geese which it were wise to slay from the mere hope of a golden egg. Percival St. John is your victim, not mine—not till you give the order would I lift a finger to harm him."

"Yes, let him live, unless my son be found to me," said Madame Dalibard, almost exultingly: "let him live to forget yon fair-faced fool, leaning now, see you, so delightedly on his arm, and fancying eternity in the hollow vows of love!—let him live to wrong and abandon her by forgetfulness, though even in the grave; to laugh at his boyish dreams—to sully her memory in the arms of harlots! Oh, if the dead can suffer, let him live that she may feel beyond the grave his inconstancy and his fall. Methinks that that thought will comfort me, if Vincent be no more, and I stand childless in the world!"

"It is so settled, then," said Varney, ever ready to clench the business that promised gold, and relieve his apprehensions of the detection of his fraud. "And now to your noiseless hands, as soon as may be, I consign the girl: she has lived long enough!"

CHAPTER XI.

LOVE AND INNOCENCE.

WHILE this the conference between these execrable and ravening birds of night and prey, Helen and her boy-lover were thus conversing in the garden, while the autumn sun—for it was in the second week of October—broke pleasantly through the yellowing leaves of the tranquil shrubs, and the flowers, which should have died with the gone summer, still fresh by their tender care, despite the lateness of the season, smiled gratefully as their light footsteps passed.

"Yes, Helen," said Percival—"yes, you will love my mother, for she is one of those people who seem to attract love, as if it were a property belonging to them. Even my dog Beau (you know how fond Beau is of *me !*) always nestles at *her* feet when we are at home. I own she has pride, but it is a pride that never offended any one. You know there are some flowers that we call *proud.* The pride of the flower is not more harmless than my mother's. But perhaps pride is not the right word—it is rather the aversion to anything low or mean, the admiration for everything pure and high. Ah, how that very pride—if pride it be—will make her love you, my Helen!"

"You need not tell me," said Helen, smiling seriously, "that I shall love your mother,—I love her already; nay, from the first moment you said you *had* a mother, my heart leapt to her. Your mother! if ever you are really jealous, it must be of her! but that she should love me—that it is what I doubt and fear. For if you were my brother, Percival, I should be so ambitious for you. A nymph must rise from the stream, a sylphid from the rose, before I could allow another to steal you from my side. And if I think I should feel this only as your sister, what can be precious enough to satisfy a mother?"

"You, and you only," answered Percival, with his blithesome laugh—"you, my sweet Helen, much better than nymph or sylphid, about whom, between ourselves, I never cared three

straws, even in a poem. How pleased you will be with Laughton! Do you know, I was lying awake all last night, to consider what room you would like best for your own? And at last I have decided:—come, listen; it opens from the music-gallery that overhangs the hall. From the window you overlook the southern side of the park, and catch a view of the lake beyond. There are two niches in the wall—one for your piano, one for your favourite books, It is just large enough to hold four persons with ease,—*our* mother and myself, your aunt, whom by that time we shall have petted into good humour; and if we can coax Ardworth there—the best good fellow that ever lived,—I think our party will be complete. By the way, I am uneasy about Ardworth, it is so long since we have seen him; I have called three times—nay, five,—but his odd-looking clerk always swears he is not at home. Tell me, Helen, now you know him so well—tell me how I can serve him? You know, I am so terribly rich (at least, I shall be in a month or two;) I can never get through my money, unless my friends will help me. And is it not shocking that that noble fellow should be so poor, and yet suffer me to call him 'friend,' as if in friendship one man should want everything, and the other nothing? Still, I don't know how to venture to propose:—come, you understand me, Helen: let us lay our wise heads together, and make him well off, in spite of himself."

It was in this loose boyish talk of Percival that he had found the way not only to Helen's heart but to her soul. For in this she (grand undeveloped poetess!) recognised a nobler poetry than we chain to rhythm—the poetry of generous deeds. She yearned to kiss the warm hand she held, and drew nearer to his side, as she answered—"And sometimes, dear, dear Percival, you wonder why I would rather listen to you than to all Mr. Varney's bitter eloquence, or even to my dear cousin's aspiring ambition. They talk well, but it is of themselves; while you——"

Percival blushed, and checked her.

"Well," she said—"well, to your question. Alas! you know little of my cousin, if you think all our arts could decoy him out of his rugged independence, and, much as I love him, I could

not wish it. But do not fear for him; he is one of those who are born to succeed, and without help."

"How do you know that, pretty prophetess?" said Percival, with the superior air of manhood. "I have seen more of the world than you have, and I cannot see why Ardworth should, *succeed*, as you call it; or, if so, why he should succeed less if he swung his hammock in a better berth than that hole in Gray's Inn, and would just let me keep him a cab and groom."

Had Percival talked of keeping John Ardworth an elephant and a palanquin, Helen could not have been more amused. She clapped her little hands in a delight that provoked Percival, and laughed out loud. Then, seeing her boy-lover's lip pouted petulantly, and his brow was overcast, she said, more seriously,—

"Do you not know what it is to feel convinced of something which you cannot explain? Well, I feel this as to my cousin's fame and fortunes. Surely, too, you must feel it, you scarce know why, when he speaks of that future, which seems so dim and so far to *me*, as of something that belonged to him."

"Very true, Helen," said Percival, "he lays it out like the map of his estate. One can't laugh when he says so carelessly, 'At such an age I shall lead my circuit,—at such an age I shall be rich,—at such an age I shall enter parliament,—and beyond that I shall look as yet no farther.' And, poor fellow, then he will be forty-three! And in the meanwhile to suffer such privations!"

"There are no privations to one who lives in the future," said Helen, with that noble intuition into lofty natures, which at times flashed from her childish simplicity, foreshadowing what, if Heaven spare her life, her maturer intellect may develop; "for Ardworth there is no such thing as poverty. He is as rich in his hopes as we are in——" She stopped short, blushed, and continued, with downcast looks, "As well might you pity me in these walks, so dreary without you. I do not live in them—I live in my thoughts of you."

Her voice trembled with emotion in those last words. She slid from Percival's arm, and timidly sat down (and he beside her) on a little mound under the single chestnut-tree, that threw its shade over the garden.

Both were silent for some moments, Percival, with grateful ecstasy,—Helen, with one of those sudden fits of mysterious melancholy, to which her nature was so subjected.

He was the first to speak. "Helen," he said gravely, "since I have known you, I feel as if life were a more solemn thing than I ever regarded it before. It seems to me as if a new and more arduous duty were added to those for which I was prepared —a duty, Helen, to become worthy of you! Will you smile? No—you will not smile, if I say I have had my brief moments of ambition. Sometimes as a boy, with Plutarch in my hand, stretched idly under the old cedar-trees at Laughton,—sometimes as a sailor, when, becalmed on the Atlantic, and my ears freshly filled with tales of Collingwood and Nelson, I stole from my comrades, and leant musingly over the boundless sea. But when this ample heritage passed to me when I had no more my own fortunes to make, my own rank to build up, such dreams became less and less frequent. Is it not true that wealth makes us contented to be obscure? Yes; I understand, while I speak, why poverty itself befriends, not cripples, Ardworth's energies. But since I have known you, dearest Helen, those dreams return more vividly than ever. He who claims you should be—must be—something nobler than the crowd! Helen!"—and he rose by an irresistible and restless impulse—"I shall not be contented till you are as proud of your choice as I of mine!"

It seemed, as Percival spoke and looked, as if boyhood were cast from him for ever. The unusual weight and gravity of his words, to which his tone gave even eloquence—the steady flash of his dark eyes,—his erect, elastic form,—all had the dignity of man. Helen gazed on him silently, and with a heart so full, that words would not come, and tears overflowed instead.

That sight sobered him at once,—he knelt down beside her, threw his arms around her—it was his first embrace,—and kissed the tears away.

"How have I distressed you?—why do you weep?"

"Let me weep on, Percival, dear Percival! These tears are like prayers,—they speak to Heaven—and of you!"

A step came noiselessly over the grass, and between the lovers and the sunlight stood Gabriel Varney.

CHAPTER XII.

SUDDEN CELEBRITY AND PATIENT HOPE.

PERCIVAL was unusually gloomy and abstracted in his way to town that day, though Varney was his companion, and in the full play of those animal spirits which he owed to his unrivalled physical organisation and the obtuseness of his conscience. Seeing, at length, that his gaiety did not communicate itself to Percival, he paused and looked at him suspiciously. A falling leaf startles the steed, and a shadow the guilty man.

"You are sad, Percival?" he said, inquiringly. "What has disturbed you?"

"It is nothing—or, at least, would seem nothing to you," answered Percival, with an effort to smile, "for I have heard you laugh at the doctrine of presentiments. We sailors are more superstitious."

"What presentiment can you possibly entertain?" asked Varney, more anxiously than Percival could have anticipated.

"Presentiments are not so easily defined, Varney. But, in truth, poor Helen has infected me. Have you not remarked that, gay as she habitually is, some shadow comes over her so suddenly, that one cannot trace the cause?"

"My dear Percival," said Varney, after a short pause, "what you say does not surprise me. It would be false kindness to conceal from you that I have heard Madame Dalibard say that her mother was, when about her age, threatened with consumptive symptoms,—but she lived many years afterwards. Nay, nay, rally yourself; Helen's appearance, despite the extreme purity of her complexion, is not that of one threatened by the terrible malady of our climate. The young are often haunted with the idea of early death. As we grow older, that thought is less cherished; in youth it is a sort of luxury. To this mournful idea (which you see you have remarked as well as I) we must attribute not only Helen's occasional melancholy but a generosity of forethought which I cannot deny myself the

pleasure of communicating to you, though her delicacy would be shocked at my indiscretion. You know how helpless her aunt is. Well, Helen, who is entitled, when of age, to a moderate competence, has persuaded me to insure her life, and accept a trust to hold the moneys (if ever unhappily due) for the benefit of my mother-in-law, so that Madame Dalibard may not be left destitute, if her niece die before she is twenty-one. How like Helen, is it not?"

Percival was too overcome to answer.

Varney resumed:—"I entreat you not to mention this to Helen; it would offend her modesty to have the secret of her good deeds thus betrayed by one to whom alone she confided them. I could not resist her entreaties, though, *entre nous* it cripples me not a little to advance for her the necessary sums for the premiums. *À propos*, this brings me to a point on which I feel, as the vulgar idiom goes, 'very awkward,'—as I always do in these confounded money matters. But you were good enough to ask me to paint you a couple of pictures for Laughton. Now, if you could let me have some portion of the sum, whatever it be (for I don't price my paintings to you), it would very much oblige me."

Percival turned away his face as he wrung Varney's hand, and muttered, with a choked voice, "Let me have my share in Helen's divine forethought. Good heavens! she, so young, to look thus beyond the grave, always for others—for others!"

Callous as the wretch was, Percival's emotion and his proposal struck Varney with a sentiment like compunction. He had designed to appropriate the lover's gold, as it was now offered; but that Percival himself should propose it, blind to the grave to which that gold paved the way, was a horror not counted in those to which his fell cupidity and his goading apprehensions had familiarised his conscience.

"No," he said, with one of those wayward scruples to which the blackest criminals are sometimes susceptible—"no. I have promised Helen to regard this as a loan to her, which she is to repay me when of age. What you may advance me is for the pictures. I have a right to do as I please with what

is bought by my own labour. And the subjects of the pictures —what shall they be?"

"For one picture try and recall Helen's aspect and attitude when you came to us in the garden, and entitle your subject,—'The Foreboding.'"

"Hem!" said Varney, hesitatingly. "And the other subject?"

"Wait for that till the joy-bells at Laughton have welcomed a bride, and then—and then, Varney," added Percival, with something of his natural joyous smile, "you must take the expression as you find it. Once under my care, and, please Heaven, the one picture shall laughingly upbraid the other!"

As this was said, the cabriolet stopped at Percival's door. Varney dined with him that day; and if the conversation flagged, it did not revert to the subject which had so darkened the bright spirits of the host, and so tried the hypocrisy of the guest. When Varney left, which he did as soon as the dinner was concluded, Percival silently put a cheque into his hands, to a greater amount than Varney had anticipated even from his generosity.

"This is for four pictures, not two," he said, shaking his head; and then, with his characteristic conceit, he added—"Well, some years hence, the world shall not call them overpaid. Adieu, my Medici; a dozen such men, and Art would revive in England."

When he was left alone, Percival sat down, and, leaning his face on both hands, gave way to the gloom which his native manliness, and the delicacy that belongs to true affection, had made him struggle not to indulge in the presence of another. Never had he so loved Helen as in that hour; never had he so intimately and intensely felt her matchless worth. The image of her unselfish, quiet, melancholy consideration for that austere, uncaressing, unsympathising relation, under whose shade her young heart must have withered, seemed to him filled with a celestial pathos. And he almost hated Varney that the cynic painter could have talked of it with that businesslike phlegm. The evening deepened; the tranquil street grew still; the air seemed close; the solitude

oppressed him; he rose abruptly, seized his hat, and went forth, slowly, and still with a heavy heart.

As he entered Piccadilly, on the broad step of that house successively inhabited by the Duke of Queensberry and Lord Hertford,—on the step of that mansion, up which so many footsteps light with wanton pleasure have gaily trod, Percival's eye fell upon a wretched, squalid, ragged object, doubled up, as it were, in that last despondency which has ceased to beg, that has no care to steal, that has no wish to live. Percival halted, and touched the outcast.

"What is the matter, my poor fellow? Take care—the policeman will not suffer you to rest here. Come, cheer up, I say! There is something to find you a better lodging!"

The silver fell unheeded on the stones. The thing of rags did not even raise its head, but a low broken voice, muttered—

"It be too late now—let 'em take me to prison—let 'em send me 'cross the sea to Buttany—let 'em hang me, if they please. I be's good for nothin' now—nothin'!"

Altered as the voice was, it struck Percival as familiar. He looked down and caught a view of the drooping face.

"Up, man, up!" he said, cheerily; "see, Providence sends you an old friend in need, to teach you never to despair again."

The hearty accent, more than the words, touched and aroused the poor creature. He rose mechanically, and a sickly, grateful smile passed over his wasted features, as he recognised St. John.

"Come! how is this? I have always understood that to keep a crossing was a flourishing trade nowadays."

"I 'as no crossin'. I 'as sold her!" groaned Beck. "I be's good for nothin' now, but to cadge about the streets, and steal, and filch, and hang like the rest on us! Thank you kindly, sir" (and Beck pulled his forelock), "but, please your onor, I vould rather make an ind on it!"

"Pooh, pooh! didn't I tell you when you wanted a friend to come to me? Why did you doubt me, foolish fellow? Pick up those shillings get a bed and a supper. Come and see me to-morrow at nine o'clock; you know where—the

same house in Curzon Street; you shall tell me then your whole story, and it shall go hard but I'll buy you another crossing, or get you something just as good.'

Poor Beck swayed a moment or two on his slender legs, like a drunken man, and then suddenly falling on his knees, he kissed the hem of his benefactor's garment, and fairly wept. Those tears relieved him—they seemed to wash the drought of despair from his heart.

"Hush, hush! or we shall have a crowd round us. You'll not forget, my poor friend, No. ——, Curzon Street—nine to-morrow. Make haste, now, and get food and rest—you look, indeed, as if you wanted them. Ah! would to Heaven all the poverty in this huge city stood here in thy person, and we could aid it as easily as I can thee!"

Percival had moved on as he said those last words, and, looking back, he had the satisfaction to see that Beck was slowly crawling after him, and had escaped the grim question of a very portly policeman, who had no doubt expressed a natural indignation at the audacity of so ragged a skeleton not keeping itself respectably at home in its churchyard.

Entering one of the clubs in St. James's Street, Percival found a small knot of politicians in eager conversation respecting a new book which had been published but a day or two before, but which had already seized the public attention with that strong grasp which constitutes always an era in an author's life, sometimes an epoch in a nation's literature. The newspapers were full of extracts from the work—the gossips, of conjecture as to the authorship. We need scarcely say that a book which makes this kind of sensation must hit some popular feeling of the hour, supply some popular want. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, therefore, its character is political: it was so in the present instance. It may be remembered that that year Parliament sat during great part of the month of October, that it was the year in which the Reform Bill was rejected by the House of Lords, and that public feeling in our time had never been so keenly excited. This work appeared during the short interval between the rejection of the Bill and the

prorogation of Parliament.[1] And what made it more remarkable was, that while stamped with the passion of the time, there was a weight of calm and stern reasoning, embodied in its vigorous periods, which gave to the arguments of the advocate something of the impartiality of the judge. Unusually abstracted and unsocial—for, despite his youth and that peculiar bashfulness before noticed, he was generally alive enough to all that passed around him—Percival paid little attention to the comments that circulated round the easy-chairs in his vicinity, till a subordinate in the administration, with whom he was slightly acquainted, pushed a small volume towards him, and said :

"You have seen this, of course, St. John? Ten to one you do not guess the author. It is certainly not B——m, though the Lord Chancellor has energy enough for anything. R—— says it has a touch of S——r."

"Could M——y have written it?" asked a young member of Parliament, timidly.

"M——y !—very like his matchless style, to be sure! You can have read very little of M——y, I should think," said the subordinate, with the true sneer of an official and a critic.

The young member could have slunk into a nutshell.

Percival, with very languid interest, glanced over the volume. But despite his mood, and his moderate affection for political writings, the passage he opened upon struck and seized him unawares. Though the sneer of the official was just, and the style was not comparable to M——y's (whose is?), still the steady rush of strong words, strong with strong thoughts—heaped massively together—showed the ease of genius and the gravity of thought :—the absence of all effeminate glitter—the iron grapple with the pith and substance of the argument opposed, seemed familiar to Percival. He thought he heard the deep bass of John Ardworth's earnest voice, when some truth roused his advocacy, or some falsehood provoked his wrath. He put down the book, bewildered. Could it be the

[1] Parliament was prorogued October 20th; the bill rejected by the Lords, October 8th.

obscure, briefless lawyer in Gray's Inn (that very morning the object of his young pity), who was thus lifted into fame? He smiled at his own credulity. But he listened with more attention to the enthusiastic praises that circled round, and the various guesses which accompanied them. Soon, however, his former gloom returned—the Babel began to chafe and weary him. He rose and went forth again into the air. He strolled on without purpose, but mechanically, into the street where he had first seen Helen. He paused a few moments under the colonnade which faced Beck's old deserted crossing. His pause attracted the notice of one of the unhappy beings whom we suffer to pollute our streets and rot in our hospitals. She approached and spoke to him—to *him* whose heart was so full of Helen! He shuddered, and strode on. At length, he paused before the twin towers of Westminster Abbey, on which the moon rested in solemn splendour; and in that space, one man only shared his solitude. A figure with folded arms leant against the iron rails, near the statue of Canning, and his gaze comprehended in one view the walls of the Parliament, in which all passions wage their war, and the glorious abbey, which gives a Walhalla to the great. The utter stillness of the figure so in unison with the stillness of the scene, had upon Percival more effect than would have been produced by the most clamorous crowd. He looked round curiously, as he passed, and uttered an exclamation as he recognised John Ardworth.

"You, Percival!" said Ardworth—"a strange meeting-place at this hour! What can bring you hither?"

"Only whim, I fear—and you?" as Percival linked his arm into Ardworth's.

"Twenty years hence I will tell you what brought me hither!" answered Ardworth, moving slowly back towards Whitehall.

"If we are alive then!"

"We live till our destinies below are fulfilled; till our uses have passed from us in this sphere, and rise to benefit another. For the soul is as a sun, but with this noble distinction, the sun is confined in its career—day after day it visits the same

lands, gilds the same planets or rather, as the astronomers hold, stands the motionless centre of moving worlds. But the soul, when it sinks into seeming darkness and the deep, rises to new destinies, fresh regions unvisited before. What we call Eternity, may be but an endless series of those transitions, which men call *deaths*, abandonments of home after home, ever to fairer scenes and loftier heights. Age after age, the spirit, that glorious Nomad, may shift its tent, fated not to rest in the dull Elysium of the Heathen, but carrying with it evermore its elements,—Activity and Desire. Why should the soul ever repose? God, its Principle, reposes never. While we speak, new worlds are sparkling forth—suns are throwing off their nebulæ—nebulæ are hardening into worlds. The Almighty proves his existence by creating. Think you that Plato is at rest, and Shakspeare only basking on a sun-cloud? Labour is the very essence of spirit as of divinity; labour is the purgatory of the erring; it may become the hell of the wicked, but labour is not less the heaven of the good!"

Ardworth spoke with unusual earnestness and passion; and his idea of the future was emblematic of his own active nature: for each of us is wisely left to shape out, amidst the impenetrable mists, his own ideal of the Hereafter. The warrior child of the biting north placed his Hela amid snows, and his Himmel in the banquets of victorious war; the son of the East, parched by relentless summer—his hell amidst fire, and his elysium by cooling streams; the weary peasant sighs through life for rest, and rest awaits his vision beyond the grave; the workman of genius—ever ardent, ever young—honours toil as the glorious development of being—and springs refreshed over the abyss of the grave—to follow, from star to star, the progress that seems to him at once the supreme felicity and the necessary law. So be it with the fantasy of each! Wisdom that is infallible, and love that never sleeps, watch over the darkness—and bid darkness be, that we may dream!

"Alas!" said the young listener—"what reproof do you not convey to those, like me, who, devoid of the power which gives results to every toil, have little left to them in life, but

to idle life away. All have not the gift to write, or harangue, or speculate, or——"

"Friend," interrupted Ardworth, bluntly; "do not belie yourself. There lives not a man on earth—out of a lunatic asylum—who has not in him the power to do good. What can writers, haranguers, or speculators do more than that? Have you ever entered a cottage—ever travelled in a coach—ever talked with a peasant in the field, or loitered with a mechanic at the loom, and not found that each of those men had a talent you had not, knew some things you knew not? The most useless creature that ever yawned at a club, or counted the vermin on his rags under the suns of Calabria, has no excuse for want of intellect. What men want is, not talent, it is purpose;—in other words, not the power to achieve but the will to labour. You, Percival St. John—*you* affect to despond, lest you should not have your uses—you, with that fresh warm heart—you, with that pure enthusiasm for what is fresh and good—you, who can even admire a thing like Varney, because, through the tawdry man, you recognise art and skill, even though wasted in spoiling canvas—you, who have only to live as you feel, in order to diffuse blessings all around you,—fie, foolish boy!—you will own your error when I tell you why I come from my rooms at Gray's Inn to see the walls in which Hampden, a plain country squire like you, shook with plain words the tyranny of eight hundred years."

"Ardworth, I will not wait your time to tell me what took you yonder. I have penetrated a secret that you, not kindly, kept from me. This morning you rose and found yourself famous; this evening you have come to gaze upon the scene of the career to which that fame will more rapidly conduct you——"

"And upon the tomb which the proudest ambition I can form on earth must content itself to win! A poor conclusion, if all ended here!"

"I am right, however," said Percival, with boyish pleasure. "It is you whose praises have just filled my ears. You, dear—dear Ardworth! How rejoiced I am!"

Ardworth pressed heartily the hand extended to him: "I

should have trusted you with my secret to-morrow, Percival; as it is, keep it for the present. A craving of my nature has been satisfied, a grief has found distraction; as for the rest, any child that throws a stone into the water with all his force can make a splash; but he would be a fool indeed, if he supposed that the splash was a sign that he had turned a stream."

Here Ardworth ceased abruptly; and Percival, engrossed by a bright idea, which had suddenly occurred to him, exclaimed,—

"Ardworth, your desire, your ambition is to enter parliament; there must be a dissolution shortly—the success of your book will render you acceptable to many a popular constituency. All you can want is a sum for the necessary expenses. Borrow that sum from me—repay me when you are in the cabinet, or attorney-general. It shall be so!"

A look so bright, that even by that dull lamplight, the glow of the cheek, the brilliancy of the eye were visible—flashed over Ardworth's face. He felt at that moment what ambitious man must feel when the object he has seen dimly and afar is placed within his grasp; but his reason was proof even against that strong temptation.

He passed his arm round the boy's slender waist, and drew him to his heart with grateful affection, as he replied,

"And what, if now in parliament, giving up my career—with no regular means of subsistence—what could I be, but a venal adventurer? Place would become so vitally necessary to me, that I should feed but a dangerous war between my conscience and my wants. In chasing *Fame*, the shadow, I should lose the substance, *Independence*—why, that very thought would paralyse my tongue. No, no—my generous friend. As labour is the arch elevator of man, so patience is the essence of labour. First let me build the foundation, I may then calculate the height of my tower. First let me be independent of the great—I will then be the champion of the lowly. Hold!—tempt me no more—do not lure me to the loss of self-esteem! And now, Percival," resumed Ardworth, in the tone of one who wishes to plunge into some utterly new current of thought—"let us forget for a while these solemn aspirations and be frolicsome

and human. '*Nemo mortalium omnibus horis sapit.*' '*Neque semper arcum tendit Apollo.*' What say you to a cigar?"

Percival stared. He was not yet familiarised to the eccentric whims of his friend!

"Hot negus and a cigar!" repeated Ardworth, while a smile, full of drollery, played round the corners of his lips, and twinkled in his deep-set eyes.

"Are you serious?

"Not serious—I have been serious enough" (and Ardworth sighed) "for the last three weeks. Who goes 'to Corinth to be sage,' or to the Cider Cellar to be serious?"

"I subscribe, then, to the negus and cigar," said Percival, smiling; and he had no cause to repent his compliance, as he accompanied Ardworth to one of the resorts favoured by that strange person in his rare hours of relaxation.

For, seated at his favourite table, which happened, luckily, to be vacant, with his head thrown carelessly back, and his negus steaming before him, John Ardworth continued to pour forth, till the clock struck three, jest upon jest—pun upon pun—broad drollery upon broad drollery, without flagging, without intermission—so varied, so copious, so ready, so irresistible, that Percival was transported out of all his melancholy, in enjoying, for the first time in his life, the exuberant gaiety of a grave mind once set free—all its intellect sparkling into wit—all its passion rushing into humour. And this was the man he had pitied!—supposed to have no sunny side to his life! How much greater had been his compassion and his wonder if he could have known all that had passed, within the last few weeks, through that gloomy, yet silent breast, which, by the very breadth of its mirth, showed what must be the depth of its sadness!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LOSS OF THE CROSSING.

DESPITE the lateness of the hour before he got to rest, Percival had already breakfasted, when his valet informed him, with raised, supercilious eyebrows, that an "uncommon ragged sort of a person insisted that he had been told to call." Though Beck had been at the house before, and the valet had admitted him—so much thinner, so much more ragged was he now, that the trim servant—no close observer of such folk—did not recognise him. However, at Percival's order, too well-bred to show surprise, he ushered Beck up with much civility; and St. John was painfully struck with the ravages a few weeks had made upon the Sweeper's countenance. The lines were so deeply ploughed—the dry hair looked so thin, and was so sown with grey that Beck might have beat all Farren's skill in the part of an old man.

The poor Sweeper's tale, extricated from its peculiar phraseology, was simple enough, and soon told:—He had returned home at night to find his hoards stolen, and the labour of his life overthrown. How he passed that night he did not very well remember. We may well suppose that the little reason he possessed was well nigh bereft from him. No suspicion of the exact thief crossed his perturbed mind. Bad as Grabman's character might be, he held a respectable position compared with the other lodgers in the house. Bill, the cracksman, naturally, and by vocation, suggested the hand that had despoiled him;—how hope for redress, or extort surrender from such a quarter? Mechanically, however, when the hour arrived to return to his day's task, he stole down the stairs, and lo, at the very door of the house, Bill's children were at play, and in the hand of the eldest he recognised what he called his "curril."

"Your curril!" interrupted St. John.

"Yes, curril—vot the little 'uns bite, afore they gets their teethin'."

St. John smiled, and supposing that Beck had some time or other been puerile enough to purchase such a bauble, nodded to him to continue. To seize upon the urchin, and, in spite of kicks, bites, shrieks, or scratches, repossess himself of his treasure, was the feat of a moment. The brat's clamour drew out the father—and to him Beck (pocketing the coral, that its golden bells might not attract the more experienced eye, and influence the more formidable greediness, of the paternal thief) loudly, and at first fearlessly, appealed. Him he charged and accused, and threatened with all vengeance, human and divine. Then changing his tone, he implored—he wept—he knelt. As soon as the startled cracksman recovered his astonishment at such audacity, and comprehended the nature of the charge against himself and his family, he felt the more indignant from a strange and unfamiliar consciousness of innocence. Seizing Beck by the nape of the neck, with a dexterous application of hand and foot, he sent him spinning into the kennel.

"Go to Jericho, mud-scraper!" cried Bill, in a voice of thunder—"and if ever thou sayst such a vopper agin—'sparaging the characters of them 'ere motheriess babes—I'll seal thee up in a 'tato sack, and sell thee for fiv'pence to No. 7, the great body-snatcher. Take care how I ever sets eyes agin on thy h-ugly mug!"

With that Bill clapped to the door, and Beck, frightened out of his wits, crawled from the kennel, and bruised and smarting, crept to his crossing. But he was unable to discharge his duties that day; his ill-fed, miserable frame was too weak for the stroke he had received. Long before dusk, he sneaked away, and dreading to return to his lodging, lest, since nothing now was left worth robbing but his carcass, Bill might keep his word and sell *that* to the body-snatcher, he took refuge under the only roof where he felt he could sleep in safety.

And here we must pause to explain. In our first introduction of Beck, we contented ourselves with implying to the ingenious and practised reader, that his heart might still be large enough to hold something besides his crossing. Now, in one of the small alleys that have their vent in the great stream of Fleet

Street, there dwelt an old widow-woman, who eked out her existence by charing—an industrious, drudging creature, whose sole occupation, since her husband, the journeyman bricklayer, fell from a scaffold, and, breaking his neck, left her happily childless, as well as penniless—had been scrubbing stone floors, and cleaning out dingy houses when about to be let,—charing, in a word. And in this vocation had she kept body and soul together, till a bad rheumatism and old age had put an end to her utilities, and entitled her to the receipt of two shillings weekly from parochial munificence. Between this old woman and Beck there was a mysterious tie—so mysterious that he did not well comprehend it himself. Sometimes he called her "mammy"—sometimes "the h-old crittur." But certain it is, that to her he was indebted for that name which he bore, to the puzzlement of St. Giles's.

Becky Carruthers was the name of the old woman; but Becky was one of those good creatures who are always called by their Christian names, and never rise into the importance of the surname, and the dignity of "Mistress;"—lopping off the last syllable of the familiar appellation, the outcast christened himself "Beck."

"And," said St. John, who in the course of question and answer had got thus far into the marrow of the Sweeper's narrative, "is not this good woman really your mother?"

"Mother!" echoed Beck, with disdain; "no, I 'as a gritter mother nor she. Sint Poll's is my mother. But the h-old crittur tuk care on me."

"I really don't understand you. Saint Paul's is your mother? How?"

Beck shook his head mysteriously, and without answering the question, resumed the tale, which we must thus paraphrastically continue to deliver.

When he was a little more than six years old, Beck began to earn his own livelihood, by running errands, holding horses, scraping together pence and halfpence. Betimes, his passion for saving began; at first with a good and unselfish motive, that of surprising "mammy," at the week's end. But when "mammy," who then gained enough for herself patted

his head and called him good boy, and bade him save for his own uses, and told him what a great thing it would be if he could lay by a pretty penny against he was a man, he turned miser on his own account; and the miserable luxury grew upon him. At last, by the permission of the police inspector, strengthened by that of the owner of the contiguous house, he made his great step in life, and succeeded a deceased negro in the dignity and emoluments of the memorable crossing. From that hour he felt himself fulfilling his proper destiny; but poor Becky, alas! had already fallen into the sere and yellow leaf! with her decline, her good qualities were impaired. She took to drinking—not to positive intoxication, but to making herself "comfortable;"—and, to satisfy her craving, Beck, waking betimes one morning, saw her emptying his pockets. Then he resolved, quietly and without upbraiding her, to remove to a safer lodging. To save had become the imperative necessity of his existence. But to do him justice, Beck had a glimmering sense of what was due to the "h-old crittur." Every Saturday evening, he called at her house, and deposited with her a certain sum, not large even in proportion to his earnings, but which seemed to the poor ignorant miser, who grudged every farthing to himself, an enormous deduction from his total, and a sum sufficient for every possible want of humankind, even to satiety. And now, in returning, despoiled of all, save the few pence he had collected that day, it is but fair to him to add that not his least bitter pang was in the remembrance that this was the only Saturday on which, for the first time, the weekly stipend would fail.

But so ill and so wretched did he look when he reached her little room, that "mammy" forgot all thought of herself; and when he had told his tale, so kind was her comforting, so unselfish her sympathy, that his heart smote him for his old parsimony, for his hard resentment at her single act of peculation;—had not she the right to all he made? But remorse and grief alike soon vanished in the fever that now seized him; for several days he was insensible; and when he recovered sufficiently to be made aware of what was around him, he saw the widow seated beside him, within four bare walls,—

everything, except the bed he slept on, had been sold to support him in his illness. As soon as he could totter forth, Beck hastened to his crossing—alas, it was preoccupied. His absence had led to ambitious usurpation. A one-legged, sturdy sailor had mounted his throne, and wielded his sceptre. The decorum of the street forbade altercation to the contending parties; but the sailor referred discussion to a meeting at a flash house in the Rookery that evening. There a jury was appointed, and the case opened. By the conventional laws that regulate this useful community, Beck was still in his rights; his reappearance sufficed to restore his claims, and an appeal to the policeman would no doubt re-establish his authority. But Beck was still so ill and so feeble, that he had a melancholy persuasion that he could not suitably perform the duties of his office; and when the sailor, not a bad fellow on the whole, offered to pay down on the nail what really seemed a very liberal sum for Beck's peaceful surrender of his rights, the poor wretch thought of the bare walls at his "mammy's," of the long, dreary interval that must elapse, even if able to work, before the furniture pawned could be redeemed by the daily profits of his post, and with a groan, he held out his hand, and concluded the bargain.

Creeping home to his "h-old crittur," he threw the purchase money into her lap; then, broken-hearted, and in despair, he slunk forth again in a sort of vague, dreamy hope, that the law, which abhors vagabonds, would seize and finish him.

When this tale was done, Percival did not neglect the gentle task of admonition, which the poor Sweeper's softened heart and dull remorse made easier. He pointed out, in soft tones, how the avarice he had indulged had been, perhaps, mercifully chastised; and drew no ineloquent picture of the vicious miseries of the confirmed miser. Beck listened humbly and respectfully, though so little did he understand of mercy, and Providence, and vice, that the diviner part of the homily was quite lost on him. However, he confessed penitently that "the mattress had made him vorse nor a beast to the h-old crittur;" and that "he was cured of saving to the end of his days."

"And now," said Percival, "as you really seem not strong

enough to bear this out-of-door work (the winter coming on, too), what say you to entering into my service? I want some help in my stables. The work is easy enough; and you are used to horses, you know, in a sort of a way."

Beck hesitated, and looked a moment undecided. At last, he said, "Please your onour, if I beant strong enough for the crossin', I'se afeard I'm too h-ailing to sarve you. And voudn't I be vorse nor a wiper, to take your vages, and not vork for 'em h-as I h-ought?"

"Pooh, we'll soon make you strong, my man. Take my advice—don't let your head run on the crossing. That kind of industry exposes you to bad company and bad thoughts."

"That's vot it is, sir," said Beck, assentingly, laying his dexter forefinger on his sinister palm.

"Well! you are in my service, then. Go down stairs now, and get your breakfast;—by and by, you shall show me your 'mammy's' house, and we'll see what can be done for her."

Beck pressed his hands to his eyes, trying hard not to cry; but it was too much for him; and as the valet, who appeared to Percival's summons, led him down the stairs, his sobs were heard from attic to basement.

CHAPTER XIV.

NEWS FROM GRABMAN.

THAT day, opening thus auspiciously to Beck, was memorable also to other and more prominent persons in this history.

Early in the forenoon a parcel was brought to Madame Dalibard which contained Ardworth's already famous book, a goodly assortment of extracts from the newspapers thereon, and the following letter from the young author:—

"You will see, by the accompanying packet, that your counsels have had weight with me. I have turned aside in my slow legitimate career. I have, as you desired, made 'men talk of

me.' What solid benefit I may reap from this I know not. I shall not openly avow the book. Such notoriety cannot help me at the bar. But *liberavi animam meam*—excuse my pedantry—I have let my soul free for a moment—I am now catching it back, to put bit and saddle on again. I will not tell you how you have disturbed me—how you have stung me into this premature rush amidst the crowd—how, after robbing me of name and father, you have driven me to this experiment with my own mind, to see if I was deceived, when I groaned to myself, 'The Public shall give you a name, and Fame shall be your mother.' I am satisfied with the experiment. I know better now what is in me; and I have regained my peace of mind. If, in the success of this hasty work, there be that which will gratify the interest you so kindly take in me, deem that success your own: I owe it to you—to your revelations—to your admonitions. I wait patiently your own time for further disclosures: till then, the wheel must work on, and the grist be ground. Kind and generous friend, till now I would not wound you by returning the sum you sent me—nay, more, I knew I should please you by devoting part of it to the risk of giving this essay to the world, and so making its good fortune doubly your own work. Now, when the publisher smiles, and the shopmen bow, and I am acknowledged to have a bank in my brains, —*now*, you cannot be offended to receive it back. Adieu. When my mind is in train again, and I feel my step firm on the old dull road, I will come to see you. Till then, yours—by what name? Open the *Biographical Dictionary* at hazard, and send me one.

"*Gray's Inn.*"

Not at the noble thoughts, and the deep sympathy with mankind, that glowed through that work, over which Lucretia now tremulously hurried, did she feel delight. All that she recognised, or desired to recognise, were those evidences of that kind of intellect which wins its way through the world, and which, strong and unmistakable, rose up in every page of that vigorous logic and commanding style. The book was soon dropped thus read; the newspaper extracts pleased even more.

"This," she said, audibly, in the freedom of her solitude—"this is the son I asked for—a son in whom I can rise—in whom I can exchange the sense of crushing infamy for the old delicious ecstasy of pride! For this son can I do too much? No; in what I may do for him, methinks there will be no remorse! And he calls his success mine—mine!" Her nostrils dilated, and her front rose erect.

In the midst of this exultation, Varney found her, and before he could communicate the business which had brought him, he had to listen, which he did with the secret gnawing envy that every other man's success occasioned him, to her haughty self-felicitations.

He could not resist saying, with a sneer, when she paused, as if to ask his sympathy:—

"All this is very fine, *belle mère;* and yet I should hardly have thought that coarse-featured, uncouth limb of the law, who seldom moves without upsetting a chair—never laughs but the panes rattle in the window—I should hardly have thought *him* the precise person to gratify your pride, or answer the family ideal of a gentleman and a St. John."

"Gabriel," said Lucretia, sternly—"you have a biting tongue, and it is folly in me to resent those privileges which our fearful connection gives you. But—this raillery——"

"Come, come, I was wrong—forgive it!" interrupted Varney, who, dreading nothing else, dreaded much the rebuke of his grim stepmother.

"It is forgiven," said Lucretia, coldly, and with a slight wave of her hand; then she added, with composure:—

"Long since—even while heiress of Laughton—I parted with mere pride in the hollow seemings of distinction. Had I not, should I have stooped to William Mainwaring? What I then respected, amidst all the degradations I have known, I respect still; talent, ambition, intellect, and will. Do you think I would exchange these in a son of mine, for the mere graces which a dancing-master can sell him? Fear not. Let us give but wealth to that intellect, and the world will see no clumsiness in the movements that march to its high places, and hear no discord in the laugh that triumphs over fools!

But you have some news to communicate, or some proposal to suggest."

"I have both," said Varney. "In the first place, I have a letter from Grabman!"

Lucretia's eyes sparkled, and she snatched eagerly at the letter her son-in-law drew forth.

"LIVERPOOL, *October*, 1831.

"JASON,—I think I am on the road to success. Having first possessed myself of the fact, commemorated in the parish register, of the birth and baptism of Alfred Braddell's son, for we must proceed regularly in these matters, I next set my wits to work to trace that son's exodus from the paternal mansion. I have hunted up an old woman-servant, Jane Prior, who lived with the Braddells. She now thrives as a laundress; she is a rank Puritan, and starches for the godly. She was at first very wary and reserved in her communications, but by siding with her prejudices and humours, and by the intercession of the Rev. Mr. Graves (of her own persuasion), I have got her to open her lips. It seems that these Braddells lived very unhappily—the husband, a pious dissenter, had married a lady who turned out of a very different practice and belief. Jane Prior pitied her master, and detested her mistress. Some circumstances in the conduct of Mrs. Braddell made the husband, who was then in his last illness, resolve, from a point of conscience, to save his child from what he deemed the contamination of her precepts and example. Mrs. Braddell was absent from Liverpool, on a visit, which was thought very unfeeling by the husband's friends; during this time Braddell was visited constantly by a gentleman (Mr. Ardworth), who differed from him greatly in some things, and seemed one of the carnal, but with whom agreement in politics (for they were both great politicians and republicans) seems to have established a link. One evening, when Mr. Ardworth was in the house, Jane Prior, who was the only maidservant (for they kept but two, and one had been just discharged), had been sent out to the apothecary's. On her return, Jane Prior going into the nursery missed the infant; she thought it was with her master; but coming into his room, Mr. Braddell told her to shut the door, informed her that he

had intrusted the boy to Mr. Ardworth, to be brought up in a righteous and pious manner, and implored and commanded her to keep this a secret from his wife, whom he was resolved, indeed, if he lived, not to receive back into his house. Braddell, however, did not survive more than two days this event. On his death, Mrs. Braddell returned; but circumstances connected with the symptoms of his malady, and a strong impression which haunted himself, and with which he had infected Jane Prior, that he had been poisoned, led to a posthumous examination of his remains. No trace of poison was, however, discovered, and suspicions that had been directed against his wife could not be substantiated by law; still, she was regarded in so unfavourable a light by all who had known them both, she met with such little kindness or sympathy in her widowhood, and had been so openly denounced by Jane Prior, that it is not to be wondered at that she left the place as soon as possible. The house, indeed, was taken from her, for Braddell's affairs were found in such confusion, and his embarrassments so great, that everything was seized and sold off,—nothing left for the widow nor for the child (if the last were ever discovered).

"As may be supposed, Mrs. Braddell was at first very clamorous for the lost child; but Jane Prior kept her promise, and withheld all clue to it. And Mrs. Braddell was forced to quit the place, in ignorance of what had become of it; since then no one had heard of her; but Jane Prior says that she is sure 'she had come to no good.' Now, though much of this may be, no doubt, familiar to you, dear Jason, it is right, when I put the evidence before you, that you should know and guard against what to expect; and in any trial at law, to prove the identity of Vincent Braddell, Jane Prior must be a principal witness, and will certainly not spare poor Mrs. Braddell. For the main point, however, viz., the suspicion of poisoning her husband, the inquest and verdict may set aside all alarm.

"My next researches have been directed on the track of Walter Ardworth, after leaving Liverpool, which (I find by the books at the inn where he lodged and was known) he did in debt to the innkeeper, the very night he received the charge of the child. Here, as yet, I am in fault; but I have asser-

tained that a woman, one of the sect, of the name of Joplin, living in a village fifteen miles from the town, had the care of some infant, to replace her own, which she had lost. I am going to this village to-morrow. But I cannot expect much in that quarter, since it would seem at variance with your more probable belief that Walter Ardworth took the child at once to Mr. Fielden's. However, you see I have already gone very far in the evidence,—the birth of the child,—the delivery of the child to Ardworth. I see a very pretty case already before us, and I do not now doubt for a moment of ultimate success.—Yours, N. GRABMAN."

Lucretia read steadily, and with no change of countenance to the last line of the letter. Then, as she put it down on the table before her, she repeated, with a tone of deep exultation—"No doubt of ultimate success!"

"You do not fear to brave all which the spite of this woman, Jane Prior, may prompt her to say against you?" asked Varney.

Lucretia's brow fell. "It is another torture," she said, "even to own my marriage with a low-born hypocrite. But I can endure it for the cause," she added, more haughtily. "Nothing can really hurt me in these obsolete aspersions, and this vague scandal. The inquest acquitted me, and the world will be charitable to the mother of him who has wealth and rank, and that vigorous genius which, if proved in obscurity, shall command opinion in renown."

"You are now, then, disposed at once to proceed to action. For Helen all is prepared,—the insurances settled,—the trust for which I hold them on your behalf is signed and completed. But for Percival St. John I await your directions. Will it be best first to prove your son's identity, or when morally satisfied that that proof is forthcoming, to remove betimes *both* the barriers to his inheritance? If we tarry for the last, the removal of St. John becomes more suspicious than it does at a time when you have no visible interest in his death. Besides, now we have the occasion, or can make it—can we tell how long it will last? Again, it will seem more natural that the lover should break his heart in the first shock of——"

"Ay," interrupted Lucretia, "I would have all thought and contemplation of crime at an end; when, clasping my boy to my heart, I can say, 'Your mother's inheritance is yours.' I would not have a murder before my eyes, when they should look only on the fair prospects beyond. I would cast back all the hideous images of horror into the rear of memory, so that hope may for once visit me again undisturbed. No, Gabriel, were I to speak for ever, you would comprehend not what I grasp at in a son! It is at a future! Rolling a stone over the sepulchre of the past—it is a resurrection into a fresh world,—it is to know again one emotion not impure —one scheme not criminal. It is, in a word, to cease to be as myself, to think in another soul, to hear my heart beat in another form. All this I covet in a son. And when all this should smile before me in his image, shall I be plucked back again into my hell, by the consciousness that a new crime is to be done? No; wade quickly through the passage of blood, that we may dry our garments, and breathe the air upon the bank where sun shines and flowers bloom!"

"So be it, then!" said Varney. "Before the week is out, I must be under the same roof as St. John. Before the week is out, why not all meet in the old halls of Laughton?"

"Ay, in the halls of Laughton! on the hearth of our ancestors the deeds done for our descendants look less dark!"

"And, first, to prepare the way, Helen should sicken in these fogs of London, and want change of air."

"Place before me that desk. I will read William Mainwaring's letters again and again, till from every shadow in the past a voice comes forth, 'The child of your rival, your betrayer, your undoer, stands between the daylight and your son!'"

CHAPTER XV.

VARIETIES.

LEAVING the guilty pair to concert their schemes, and indulge their atrocious hopes, we accompany Percival to the hovel occupied by Becky Carruthers.

On following Beck into the room she rented, Percival was greatly surprised to find, seated comfortably on the only chair to be seen, no less a person than the worthy Mrs. Mivers. This good lady, in her spinster days, had earned her own bread by hard work. She had captivated Mr. Mivers when but a simple housemaid in the service of one of his relations. And while this humble condition in her earlier life may account for much in her language and manners which is nowadays inconsonant with the breeding and education that characterise the wives of opulent tradesmen, so perhaps the remembrance of it made her unusually susceptible to the duties of charity. For there is no class of society more prone to pity and relieve the poor than females in domestic service; and this virtue Mrs. Mivers had not laid aside, as many do, so soon as she was in a condition to practise it with effect. Mrs. Mivers blushed scarlet on being detected in her visit of kindness, and hastened to excuse herself by the information that she belonged to a society of ladies for "The Bettering the Condition of the Poor," and that having just been informed of Mrs. Becky's destitute state, she had looked in to recommend her—a ventilator!

"It is quite shocking to see how little the poor attends to the proper wentilating their houses. No wonder there's so much typus about!" said Mrs. Mivers. "And for one-and-sixpence we can introduce a stream of hair that goes up the chimbly, and carries away all that it finds!"

"I 'umbly thank you, marm," said the poor bundle of rags that went by the name of "Becky," as with some difficulty she contrived to stand in the presence of the benevolent visitor

"but I am much afeard that the hair will make the rheumatiz very rumpatious!"

"On the contrary—on the contrary," said Mrs. Mivers, triumphantly; and she proceeded philosophically to explain that all the fevers, aches, pains, and physical ills that harass the poor arise from the want of an air-trap in the chimney, and a perforated network in the window-pane. Becky listened patiently; for Mrs. Mivers was only a philosopher in her talk, and she had proved herself anything but a philosopher in her actions, by the spontaneous present of five shillings, and the promise of a basket of victuals, and some good wine, to keep the cold wind she invited to the apartment out of the stomach.

Percival imitated the silence of Becky, whose spirit was so bowed down by an existence of drudgery, that not even the sight of her foster-son could draw her attention from the respect due to a superior.

"And is this poor cranky-looking cretur your son, Mrs. Becky?" said the visitor, struck at last by the appearance of the ex-Sweeper, as he stood at the threshold, hat in hand.

"No, indeed, marm," answered Becky; "I often says—says I—'Child, you be the son of Sint Poll's.'"

Beck smiled proudly.

"It was agin the grit church, marm—but it's a long story. My poor good man had not a long been dead—as good a man as hever lived, marm," and Becky dropped a curtsey; "he fell off a scaffold, and pitched right on his 'ead—or I should not have come on the parish, marm—and that's the truth on't!"

"Very well, I shall call and hear all about it—a sad case, I dare say. You see, your husband should have subscribed to our Loan Society, and then they'd have found him a 'andsome coffin, and given three pounds to his widder. But the poor are so benighted in these parts. I'm sure, sir, I can't guess what brought you here—but that's no business of mine. And how are all at Old Brompton?"—here Mrs. Mivers bridled indignantly. "There was a time when Miss Mainwaring was very glad to come and chat with Mr. M. and myself; but now 'rum has riz,' as the saying is—not but what I dare

say it's not her fault, poor thing!—that stiff aunt of hers—*she* need not look so high—pride and poverty, forsooth!"

While delivering these conciliatory sentences, Mrs. Mivers had gathered up her gown, and was evidently in the bustle of departure. As she now nodded to Becky, Percival stepped up, and, with his irresistible smile, offered her his arm. Much surprised, and much flattered, Mrs. Mivers accepted it. As she did so, he gently detained her, while he said to Becky:—

"My good friend, I have brought you the poor lad, to whom you have been a mother, to tell you that good deeds find their reward sooner or later. As for him, make yourself easy; he will inform you of the new step he has taken; and for you, good, kind-hearted creature, thank the boy you brought up if your old age shall be made easy and cheerful. Now, Beck, silly lad, go and tell all to your nurse! Take care of this step, Mrs. Mivers.

As soon as he was in the street, Percival, who, if amused at the ventilator, had seen the five shillings gleam on Becky's palm, and felt that he had found under the puce-coloured gown a good woman's heart to understand him, gave Mrs. Mivers a short sketch of poor Becky's history and misfortunes, and so contrived to interest her in behalf of the nurse, that she willingly promised to become Percival's almoner, to execute his commission, to improve the interior of Becky's abode, and distribute weekly the liberal stipend he proposed to settle on the old widow. They had grown, indeed, quite friendly and intimate by the time he reached the smart plate-glazed mahogany-coloured *façade*, within which the flourishing business of Mr. Mivers was carried on; and when, knocking at the private door, promptly opened by a lemon-coloured page, she invited him up stairs, it so chanced that the conversation had slid off to Helen, and Percival was sufficiently interested to bow assent, and to enter.

Though all the way up the stairs Mrs. Mivers, turning back at every other step, did her best to impress upon her young visitor's mind the important fact that they kept their household establishment at their "willer," and that their apartments in Fleet Street were only a "conwenience," the store set by

the worthy housewife upon her goods and chattels was sufficiently visible in the drugget that threaded its narrow way up the gay Brussels stair-carpet, and in certain layers of paper, which protected from the profanation of immediate touch the mahogany handrail. And nothing could exceed the fostering care exhibited in the drawing-room, when the door thrown open admitted a view of its damask moreen curtains, pinned back from such impertinent sunbeams as could force their way through the foggy air of the east into the windows, and the ells of yellow muslin that guarded the frames, at least, of a collection of coloured prints, and two kit-kat portraitures of Mr. Mivers and his lady, from the perambulations of the flies.

But Percival's view of this interior was somewhat impeded by his portly guide, who, uttering a little exclamation of surprise, stood motionless on the threshold, as she perceived Mr. Mivers seated by the hearth in close conference with a gentleman whom she had never seen before. At that hour, it was so rare an event in the life of Mr. Mivers to be found in the drawing-room, and that he should have an acquaintance unknown to his helpmate was a circumstance so much rarer still, that Mrs. Mivers may well be forgiven for keeping St. John standing at the door till she had recovered her amaze.

Meanwhile, Mr. Mivers rose in some confusion, and was apparently about to introduce his guest, when that gentleman coughed and pinched the host's arm significantly. Mr. Mivers coughed also, and stammered out—"A gentleman, Mrs. M. —a friend;—stay with us a day or two. Much honoured—hum!"

Mrs. Mivers stared and curtseyed, and stared again. But there was an open, good-humoured smile in the face of the visitor, as he advanced and took her hand, that attracted a heart very easily conciliated. Seeing that that was no moment for further explanation, she plumped herself into a seat, and said—

"But bless us and save us, I am keeping you standing, Mr. St. John!"

"St. John!" repeated the visitor, with a vehemence that startled Mrs. Mivers.

"Your name is St John, sir—related to the St. Johns of Laughton!"

"Yes, indeed," answered Percival, with his shy, arch smile "Laughton at present has no worthier owner than myself."

The gentleman made two strides to Percival, and shook him heartily by the hand.

"This is pleasant, indeed!" he exclaimed. "You must excuse my freedom; but I knew well poor old Sir Miles, and my heart warms at the sight of his representative."

Percival glanced at his new acquaintance, and on the whole was prepossessed in his favour. He seemed somewhere on the sunnier side of fifty, with that superb yellow bronze of complexion which betokens long residence under eastern skies. Deep wrinkles near the eyes, and a dark circle round them, spoke of cares and fatigue, and perhaps dissipation. But he had evidently a vigour of constitution that had borne him passably through all; his frame was wiry and nervous; his eye bright and full of life; and there was that abrupt, unsteady, mercurial restlessness in his movements and manner, which usually accompanies the man whose sanguine temperament prompts him to concede to the impulse, and who is blessed or cursed with a superabundance of energy, according as circumstance may favour or judgment correct, that equivocal gift of constitution.

Percival said something appropriate in reply to so much cordiality paid to the account of the Sir Miles whom he had never seen, and seated himself—colouring slightly under the influence of the fixed, pleased, and earnest look still bent upon him.

Searching for something else to say, Percival asked Mrs. Mivers if she had lately seen John Ardworth.

The guest, who had just reseated himself, turned his chair round at that question with such vivacity, that Mrs. Mivers heard it crack. Her chairs were not meant for such usage. A shade fell over her rosy countenance as she replied—

"No, indeed (please, sir, them chairs is brittle)! No—he is

like Madame at Brompton, and seldom condescends to favour us now. It was but last Sunday we asked him to dinner. I am sure he need not turn up his nose at our roast beef and pudding!"

Here Mr. Mivers was taken with a violent fit of coughing, which drew off his wife's attention. She was afraid he had taken cold.

The stranger took out a large snuff-box, inhaled a long pinch of snuff, and said to St. John:—

"This Mr. John Ardworth, a pert enough jackanapes, I suppose—a limb of the law, eh?"

"Sir," said Percival gravely, "John Ardworth is my particular friend. It is clear that you know very little of him."

"That's true," said the stranger—"'pon my life, that's very true. But I suppose he's like all lawyers—cunning and tricky, conceited and supercilious, full of prejudice and cant, and a red-hot Tory into the bargain. I know them, sir—I know them!"

"Well," answered St. John, half gaily, half angrily, "your general experience serves you very little here; for Ardworth is exactly the opposite of all you have described."

"Even in politics?"

"Why, I fear he is half a Radical—certainly more than a Whig," answered St. John, rather mournfully; for his own theories were all the other way, notwithstanding his unpatriotic forgetfulness of them, in his offer to assist Ardworth's entrance into parliament.

"I am very glad to hear it," cried the stranger, again taking snuff. "And this Madame at Brompton—perhaps I know her a little better than I do young Mr. Ardworth—Mrs. Brad—I mean Madame Dalibard!" and the stranger glanced at Mr. Mivers, who was slowly recovering from some vigorous slaps on the back, administered to him by his wife, as a counter-irritant to the cough. "Is it true that she has lost the use of her limbs?"

Percival shook his head.

"And takes care of poor Helen Mainwaring, the orphan? Well, well! that looks amiable enough. I must see—I must see!"

"Who shall I say inquired after her, when I see Madame Dalibard?" asked Percival, with some curiosity.

"Who? Oh, Mr. Tomkins. She will not recollect him, though."—and the stranger laughed, and Mr. Mivers laughed too; and Mrs. Mivers, who, indeed, always laughed when other people laughed, laughed also. So Percival thought he ought to laugh for the sake of good company, and all laughed together as he arose and took leave.

He had not, however, got far from the house, on his way to his cabriolet, which he had left by Temple Bar, when, somewhat to his surprise he found Mr. Tomkins at his elbow.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. St. John, but I have only just returned to England, and on such occasions a man is apt to seem curious. This young lawyer; you see the elder Ardworth (a good-for-nothing scamp!) was a sort of friend of mine—not exactly friend, indeed, for, by Jove, I think he was a worse friend to me than he was to anybody else—still I had a foolish interest for him, and should be glad to hear something more about any one bearing his name than I can coax out of that droll little linendraper. You are really intimate with young Ardworth, eh?"

"Intimate! poor fellow, he will not let any one be that! He works too hard to be social. But I love him sincerely; and I admire him beyond measure."

"The dog has industry, then—that's good. And does he make debts, like that rascal, Ardworth senior?"

"Really, sir, I must say, this tone with respect to Mr. Ardworth's father——"

"What the devil, sir! Do you take the father's part as well as the son's?"

"I don't know anything about Mr. Ardworth senior," said Percival, pouting; "but I do know that my friend would not allow any one to speak ill of his father in his presence; and I beg you, sir, to consider, that whatever would offend him must offend me."

"Gad's my life! He's the luckiest young rogue to have such a friend. Sir, I wish you a very good day."

Mr. Tomkins took off his hat—bowed—and passing St. John

with a rapid step, was soon lost to his eye amongst the crowd hurrying westward.

But our business being now rather with him than Percival we leave the latter to mount his cabriolet, and we proceed with Mr. Mivers's mercurial guest on his eccentric way through the throng. There was an odd mixture of thoughtful abstraction and quick observation in the soliloquy in which this gentleman indulged, as he walked briskly on.

"A pretty young spark, that St. John! A look of his father, but handsomer, and less affected. I like him. Fine shop that —very! London wonderfully improved. A hookah in that window!—God bless me!—a real hookah! This is all very good news about that poor boy—very. After all, he is not to blame if his mother was such a damnable—— I must contrive to see and judge of him myself as soon as possible. Can't trust to others—too sharp for that! What an ugly dog that is, looking after me! It is certainly a bailiff. Hang it!—what do I care for bailiffs? Hem—hem!" And the gentleman thrust his hands into his pockets, and laughed, as the jingle of coin reached his ear through the din without. "Well, I must make haste to decide; for really there is a very troublesome piece of business before me. Plague take her!—what can have become of the woman? I shall have to hunt out a sharp lawyer. But John's a lawyer himself. No—attorneys, I suppose, are the men. Gad! they were sharp enough when they had to hunt me. What's that great bill on the wall about?—'Down with the Lords.' Pooh, pooh! Master John Bull, you love Lords a great deal too much for that. A prettyish girl! English women are very good-looking, certainly. That Lucretia—what shall I do, *if*—— Ah, time enough to think of her, when I have got over that mighty stiff *if!*"

In such cogitations and mental remarks our traveller whiled away the time, till he found himself in Piccadilly. There, a publisher's shop (and he had that keen eye for shops which betrays the stranger in London), with its new publications exposed at the window, attracted his notice. Conspicuous amongst the rest was the open title-page of a book, at the foot of which was placed a placard, with the enticing words.—

"FOURTH EDITION: JUST OUT," in red capitals. The title of the work struck his irritable, curious fancy; he walked into the shop—asked for the volume—and while looking over the contents with muttered ejaculations: "Good!—capital! why this reminds one of Horne Tooke! What's the price? very dear—must have it though—must. Ha! ha! home-thrust there!"—while thus turning over the leaves, and rending them asunder with his forefinger, regardless of the paper-cutter extended to him by the shopman, a gentleman pushing by him, asked if the publisher was at home; and as the shopman, bowing very low, answered "Yes," the new comer darted into a little recess behind the shop. Mr. Tomkins, who had looked up very angrily on being jostled so unceremoniously, started and changed colour, when he saw the face of the offender. "Saints in Heaven!" he murmured almost audibly; "what a look of that woman and yet—no—it is gone!"

"Who is that gentleman?" he asked, abruptly, as he paid for his book.

The shopman smiled, but answered, "I don't know, sir."

"That's a lie!—you would never bow so low to a man you did not know!"

The shopman smiled again. "Why, sir, there are many who come to this house who don't wish us to know them."

"Ah, I understand! you are political publishers—afraid of libels, I dare say. Always the same thing in this cursed country, and then they tell us we are 'free!' So I suppose that gentleman has written something William Pitt does not like. But William Pitt—ha—he's dead!—very true, so he is! Sir, this little book seems most excellent; but, in my time, a man would have been sent to Newgate for printing it."

While thus running on, Mr. Tomkins had edged himself pretty close to the recess, within which the last comer had disappeared; and there, seated on a high stool, he contrived to read and to talk at the same time, but his eye and his ear were both turned every instant towards the recess.

The shopman, little suspecting that in so very eccentric, garrulous a person, he was permitting a spy to encroach upon the secrets of the house, continued to make up sundry parcels

of the new publication which had so enchanted his customer, while he expatiated on the prodigious sensation the book had created; and while the customer himself had already caught enough of the low conversation within the recess to be aware that the author of the book was the very person who had so roused his curiosity.

Not till that gentleman, followed to the door by the polite publisher, had quitted the shop, did Mr. Tomkins put this volume in his pocket, and, with a familiar nod at the shopman take himself off.

He was scarcely in the street, when he saw Percival St. John leaning out of his cabriolet, and conversing with the author he had discovered. He halted a moment irresolute, but the young man, in whom our reader recognises John Ardworth, declining St. John's invitation to accompany him to Brompton, resumed his way through the throng; the cabriolet drove on; and Mr. Tomkins, though with a graver mien and a steadier step, continued his desultory rambles. Meanwhile, John Ardworth strode gloomily back to his lonely chamber.

There, throwing himself on the well-worn chair before the crowded desk, he buried his face in his hands, and for some minutes he felt all that profound despondency peculiar to those who have won fame, to add to the dark volume of experience the conviction of fame's nothingness. For some minutes, he felt an illiberal and ungrateful envy of St. John—so fair, so light-hearted, so favoured by fortune, so rich in friends—in a mother's love, and in Helen's half-plighted troth. And he, from his very birth, cut off from the social ties of blood—no mother's kiss to reward the toils, or gladden the sports, of childhood—no father's cheering word up the steep hill of man! And Helen, for whose sake he had so often, when his heart grew weary, nerved himself again to labour, saying—"Let me be rich, let me be great, and then I will dare to tell Helen that I love her!"—Helen smiling upon another, unconscious of his pangs! What could fame bestow in compensation? What matter that strangers praised, and the babble of the world's running stream lingered its brief moment round the pebble in its way. In the bitterness of his mood, he was unjust to his

rival. All that exquisite but half-concealed treasure of imagination and thought which lay beneath the surface of Helen's childlike smile he believed that he alone—he, soul of power and son of genius, was worthy to discover and to prize. In the pride not unfrequent with that kingliest of all aristocracies, the Chiefs of Intellect, he forgot the grandeur which invests the attributes of the heart—forgot that, in the lists of love, the heart is at least the equal of the mind. In the reaction that follows great excitement, Ardworth had morbidly felt, that day, his utter solitude—felt it in the streets through which he had passed—in the home to which he had returned—the burning tears, shed for the first time since childhood, forced themselves through his clasped fingers. At length, he rose, with a strong effort at self-mastery—some contempt of his weakness, and much remorse at his ungrateful envy. He gathered together the soiled manuscript and dingy proofs of his book, and thrust them through the grimy bars of his grate; then, opening his desk, he drew out a small packet, with tremulous fingers, unfolding paper after paper, and gazed, with eyes still moistened, on the relics kept till then, in the devotion of the only *sentiment* inspired by Eros, that had ever, perhaps, softened his iron nature: these were two notes from Helen—some violets she had once given him, and a little purse she had knitted for him (with a playful prophecy of future fortunes), when he had last left the vicarage. Nor blame him, ye who with more habitual romance of temper, and richer fertility of imagination, can reconcile the tenderest memories with the sternest duties, if he, with all his strength, felt that the associations connected with those tokens would but enervate his resolves, and embitter his resignation. You can guess not the extent of the sacrifice, the bitterness of the pang, when, averting his head, he dropped those relics on the hearth. The evidence of the desultory ambition, the tokens of the visionary love—the same flame leapt up to devour both! It was as the funeral pyre of his youth!

"So!" he said to himself, "let all that can divert me from the true ends of my life—consume!—Labour, take back your son."

An hour afterwards, and his clerk, returning home, found Ardworth employed as calmly as usual on his Law Reports.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE INVITATION TO LAUGHTON.

THAT day, when he called at Brompton, Percival reported to Madame Dalibard his interview with the eccentric Mr. Tomkins. Lucretia seemed chafed and disconcerted by the inquiries with which that gentleman had honoured her, and as soon as Percival had gone, she sent for Varney. He did not come till late—she repeated to him what St. John had said of the stranger. Varney participated in her uneasy alarm. The name, indeed, was unknown to them, nor could they conjecture the bearer of so ordinary a patronymic; but there had been secrets enow in Lucretia's life, to render her apprehensive of encountering those who had known her in earlier years; and Varney feared lest any rumour reported to St. John might create his mistrust, or lessen the hold obtained upon a victim heretofore so unsuspicious. They both agreed in the expediency of withdrawing themselves and St. John, as soon as possible, from London, and frustrating Percival's chance of closer intercourse with the stranger, who had evidently aroused his curiosity.

The next day Helen was much indisposed, and the symptoms grew so grave towards the evening, that Madame Dalibard expressed alarm, and willingly suffered Percival (who had only been permitted to see Helen for a few minutes, when her lassitude was so extreme that she was obliged to retire to her room) to go in search of a physician: he returned with one of the most eminent of the faculty. On the way to Brompton, in reply to the questions of Dr. ——, Percival spoke of the dejection to which Helen was occasionally subject, and this circumstance confirmed Dr. ——, after he had seen his patient, in his view of the case. In addition to some feverish and inflammatory symptoms which he trusted his prescriptions would speedily remove, he found great nervous debility, and willingly fell in with the casual suggestion of Varney, who was present, that a change of air would greatly improve Miss Mainwaring's general

health, as soon as the temporary acute attack had subsided. He did not regard the present complaint very seriously, and reassured poor Percival by his cheerful mien and sanguine predictions. Percival remained at the house the whole day, and had the satisfaction, before he left, of hearing that the remedies had already abated the fever, and that Helen had fallen into a profound sleep. Walking back to town with Varney, the last said, hesitatingly—"You were saying to me the other day, that you feared you should have to go for a few days, both to Vernon Grange and to Laughton, as your steward wished to point out to you some extensive alterations in the management of your woods to commence this autumn. As you were so soon coming of age, Lady Mary desired that her directions should yield to your own. Now, since Helen is recommended change of air, why not invite Madame Dalibard to visit you at one of these places? I would suggest Laughton. My poor mother-in-law, I know longs to revisit the scenes of her youth, and you could not compliment or conciliate her more than by such an invitation."

"Oh," said Percival, joyfully, "it would realise the fondest dream of my heart to see Helen under the old roof-tree of Laughton; but as my mother is abroad, and there is therefore no lady to receive them, perhaps——"

"Why," interrupted Varney, "Madame Dalibard herself is almost the very person whom *les bienséances* might induce you to select to do the honours of your house in Lady Mary's absence; not only as kinswoman to yourself, but as the nearest surviving relative of Sir Miles—the most immediate descendant of the St. Johns; her mature years and decorum of life, her joint kindred to Helen and yourself, surely remove every appearance of impropriety.

"If she thinks so, certainly—I am no accurate judge of such formalities. You could not oblige me more, Varney, than in pre-obtaining her consent to the proposal. Helen at Laughton! —Oh, blissful thought!"

"And in what air would she be so likely to revive?" said Varney, but his voice was thick and husky.

The ideas thus presented to him almost banished its anxiety

from Percival's breast. In a thousand delightful shapes they haunted him during the sleepless night. And when, the next morning, he found that Helen was surprisingly better, he pressed his invitation upon Madame Dalibard with a warmth that made her cheek yet more pale, and the hand, which the boy grasped as he pleaded, as cold as the dead. But she briefly consented, and Percival, allowed a brief interview with Helen, had the rapture to see her smile in a delight as childlike as his own at the news he communicated, and listen, with swimming eye, when he dwelt on the walks they should take together, amidst haunts to become henceforth dear to her as to himself. Fairyland dawned before them.

The visit of the physician justified Percival's heightened spirits. All the acuter symptoms had vanished already. He sanctioned his patient's departure from town as soon as Madame Dalibard's convenience would permit, and recommended only a course of restorative medicines to strengthen the nervous system, which was to commence with the following morning, and be persisted in for some weeks. He dwelt much on the effect to be derived from taking these medicines, the first thing in the day, as soon as Helen woke. Varney and Madame Dalibard exchanged a rapid glance. Charmed with the success that in this instance had attended the skill of the great physician, Percival, in his usual zealous benevolence, now eagerly pressed upon Madame Dalibard the wisdom of consulting Dr. —— for her own malady; and the doctor, putting on his spectacles, and drawing his chair nearer to the frowning cripple, began to question her of her state; but Madame Dalibard abruptly and discourteously put a stop to all interrogatories—she had already exhausted all remedies art could suggest—she had become reconciled to her deplorable infirmity, and lost all faith in physicians:—some day or other she might try the baths at Egra, but, till then, she must be permitted to suffer undisturbed.

The doctor, by no means wishing to undertake a case of chronic paralysis, rose smilingly, and with a liberal confession that the German baths were sometimes extremely efficacious in such complaints, pressed Percival's outstretched hand, then

slipped his own into his pocket, and bowed his way out of the room.

Relieved from all apprehension, Percival very good-humouredly received the hint of Madame Dalibard, that the excitement through which she had gone for the last twenty-four hours rendered her unfit for his society, and went home to write to Laughton, and prepare all things for the reception of his guests. Varney accompanied him. Percival found Beck in the hall, already much altered, and embellished, by a new suit of livery. The ex-sweeper stared hard at Varney, who, without recognising, in so smart a shape, the squalid tatterdemalion who had lighted him up the stairs to Mr. Grabman's apartments, passed him by into Percival's little study, on the ground-floor.

"Well, Beck," said Percival, ever mindful of others, and attributing his groom's astonished gaze at Varney to his admiration of that gentleman's showy exterior—"I shall send you down to the country to-morrow with two of the horses —so you may have to-day to yourself, to take leave of your nurse. I flatter myself you will find her rooms a little more comfortable than they were yesterday."

Beck heard with a bursting heart; and his master, giving him a cheering tap on the shoulder, left him to find his way into the streets, and to Becky's abode.

He found, indeed, that the last had already undergone the magic transformation which is ever at the command of godlike wealth. Mrs. Mivers, who was naturally prompt and active, had had pleasure in executing Percival's commission. Early in the morning, floors had been scrubbed—the windows cleaned —the ventilator fixed;—then followed porters with chairs and tables, and a wonderful Dutch clock, and new bedding, and a bright piece of carpet; and then came two servants belonging to Mrs. Mivers to arrange the chattels; and finally, when all was nearly completed, the Avater of Mrs. Mivers herself, to give the last finish with her own mittened hands, and in her own housewifely apron.

The good lady was still employed in ranging a set of tea-cups on the shelves of the dresser, when Beck entered; and his old

nurse, in the overflow of her gratitude, hobbled up to her foundling, and threw her arms round his neck.

"That's right!" said Mrs. Mivers, good-humouredly, turning round, and wiping the tear from her eye. "You ought to make much of him, poor lad; he has turned out a godsend, indeed; and, upon my word, he looks very respectable in his new clothes. But what is this—a child's coral?" as, opening a drawer in the dresser, she discovered Beck's treasure. "Dear me, it is a very handsome one—why, these bells look like gold!"—and suspicion of her *protégé's* honesty for a moment contracted her thoughtful brow—"how ever on earth did you come by this, Mrs. Becky?"

"Sure and sartain," answered Becky, dropping her mutilated curtsey, "I be's glad it be found now, instead of sum days afore, or I might have been vicked enough to let it go with the rest to the pop-shop; and I'm sure the time's out of mind, ven that 'ere boy was a h-urchin, that I've risted the timtashung, and said, 'No Becky Carruthers, that maun't go to my h-uncle's!'"

"And why not, my good woman?"

"Lor' love you, marm, if that curril could speak, who knows vot it might say—eh, lad, who knows? You sees, marm, my good man had not a long been dead—I could not a get no vork, no vays—'Becky Carruthers,' says I, 'you must go out in the streets a begging!' I niver thought I should a come to that. But my poor husband, you sees, marm, fell from a scaffol,—as good a man as h-ever——"

"Yes, yes, you told me all that before," said Mrs. Mivers, growing impatient, and already diverted from her interest in the coral by a new cargo, all bright from the tinman, which, indeed, no less instantaneously, absorbed the admiration both of Beck and his nurse. And what with the inspection of these articles, and the comments each provoked, the coral rested in peace on the dresser, till Mrs. Mivers, when just about to renew her inquiries, was startled by the sound of the Dutch clock striking four, a voice which reminded her of the lapse of time, and her own dinner-hour. So, with many promises to call again, and have a good chat with her humble

friend, she took her departure, amidst the blessings of Becky, and the less noisy, but not less grateful, salutations of Beck.

Very happy was the evening these poor creatures passed together over their first cup of tea from the new bright copper kettle, and the almost forgotten luxury of crumpets, in which their altered circumstances permitted them without extravagance to indulge. In the course of conversation, Beck communicated how much he had been astonished by recognising the visitor of Grabman, the provoker of the irritable grave-stealer, in the familiar companion of his master; and when Becky told him how often, in the domestic experience her avocation of charing had accumulated, she had heard of the ruin brought on rich young men by gamblers and sharpers, Beck promised to himself to keep a sharp eye on Grabman's showy acquaintance. "For master is but a babe like," said he, majestically, "and I'd be cut into mincemeat afore I'd let an 'air on his 'ead come to 'arm, if so be's h-as 'ow I could perwent it."

We need not say that his nurse confirmed him in these good resolutions.

"And now," said Beck, when the time came for parting, "you'll keep from the gin-shop, old 'oman, and not shame the young master?"

"Sartin sure," answered Becky; "it is only ven vun is down in the vorld that vun goes to the licker-shop. Now, h-indeed,"—and she looked round very proudly—"I 'as a 'spectable stashion, and I vouldn't go for to lower it, and let 'em say that Becky Carruthers does not know how to conduct herself. The curril will be safe enuff now—but praps you had best take it yourself, lad."

"Vot should I do vith it? I've had enuff of the 'sponsibility. Put it up in a 'ankerchiff, and praps ven master gets married, and 'as a babby vots teethin', he vil say, 'Thank ye, Beck, for your curril.' Vould not that make us proud, mammy?"

Chuckling heartily at that vision, Beck kissed his nurse, and trying hard to keep himself upright, and do credit to the dignity of his cloth, returned to his new room over the stables.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE WAKING OF THE SERPENT.

AND how, O Poet of the sad belief, and eloquence, "like ebony at once dark and splendid,"[1] how couldst thou, august Lucretius, deem it but sweet to behold from the steep the strife of the great sea, or, safe from the peril, gaze on the wrath of the battle, or, serene in the temples of the wise, look afar on the wanderings of human error? Is it so sweet to survey the ills from which thou art delivered? Shall not the strong law of SYMPATHY find thee out, and thy heart rebuke thy philosophy? Not sweet, indeed, can be man's shelter in self, when he says to the storm, "I have no bark on the sea;" or to the gods of the battle, "I have no son in the slaughter;" when he smiles unmoved upon Woe, and murmurs, "Weep on, for these eyes know no tears;" when, unappalled, he beholdeth the black deeds of crime, and cries to his conscience, "Thou art calm:"—Yet solemn is the sight to him, who lives in all life; seeks for Nature in the storm, and Providence in the battle; loses self in the woe; probes his heart in the crime; and owns no philosophy that sets him free from the fetters of man. Not in vain do we scan all the contrasts in the large framework of civilised earth, if we note, "when the dust groweth into hardness, and the clods cleave fast together." Range, O Art, through all space, clasp together in extremes, shake idle wealth from its lethargy, and bid States look in hovels, where the teacher is dumb and Reason unweeded runs to rot! Bid haughty Intellect pause in its triumph, and doubt if intellect alone can deliver the soul from its tempters! Only *that* lives uncorrupt which preserves in all seasons the human affections in which the breath of God breathes and is! Go forth to the world. O Art!—go forth to the innocent, the guilty;—the wise, and the dull!—go forth as the still voice of Fate!—speak of

[1] It was said of Tertullian that "his style was like ebony, dark and splendid."

the insecurity even of goodness below!—carry on the rapt vision of suffering Virtue through "the doors of the shadows of death!"—show the dim revelation symbolled forth in the Tragedy of old!—how incomplete is man's destiny, how undeveloped is the justice divine, if Antigone sleep eternally in the ribs of the rock, and Œdipus vanish for ever in the Grove of the Furies! Here, below, "the waters are hid with a stone, and the face of the deep is frozen!" But above liveth He "who can bind the sweet influence of the Pleiades, and loose the bands of Orion." Go with Fate over the bridge, and she vanishes in the land beyond the gulf! Behold where the Eternal demands Eternity for the progress of His creatures and the vindication of His justice!

It was past midnight, and Lucretia sat alone in her dreary room; her head buried on her bosom, her eyes fixed on the ground, her hands resting on her knees:—it was an image of inanimate prostration and decrepitude that might have moved compassion to its depth. The door opened, and Martha entered, to assist Madame Dalibard, as usual, to retire to rest. Her mistress slowly raised her eyes at the noise of the opening door, and those eyes took their searching, penetrating acuteness, as they fixed upon the florid nor uncomely countenance of the waiting-woman.

In her starched cap, her sober-coloured stuff gown—in her prim, quiet manner and a certain sanctified demureness of aspect, there was something in the first appearance of this woman that impressed you with the notion of respectability, and inspired confidence in those steady good qualities which we seek in a trusty servant. But, more closely examined, an habitual observer might have found much to qualify, perhaps to disturb his first prepossessions. The exceeding lowness of the forehead, over which that stiff harsh hair was so puritanically parted—the severe hardness of those thin, small lips, so pursed up and constrained—even a certain dull cruelty in those light, cold blue eyes, might have caused an uneasy sentiment, almost approaching to fear. The fat grocer's spoiled child instinctively recoiled from her, when she entered the shop to make her household purchases; the old, grey-whiskered terrier dog, at

the public house, slunk into the tap when she crossed the threshold.

Madame Dalibard silently suffered herself to be wheeled into the adjoining bedroom, and the process of disrobing was nearly completed before she said abruptly—

"So you attended Mr. Varney's uncle in his last illness. Did he suffer much?"

"He was a poor creature at best," answered Martha; "but he gave me a deal of trouble afore he went. He was a scranny corpse when I strecked him out."

Madame Dalibard shrank from the hands at that moment employed upon herself, and said—

"It was not, then, the first corpse you have laid out for the grave?"

"Not by many."

"And did any of those you so prepared die of the same complaint?"

"I can't say, I'm sure," returned Martha. "I never inquires how folks die; my bizness was to nurse 'em till all was over, and then to sit up. As they say in my country—'Riving Pike wears a hood, when the weather bodes ill.'"[1]

"And when you sat up with Mr. Varney's uncle, did you feel no fear in the dead of the night?—that corpse before you—no fear?"

"Young Mr. Varney said I should come to no harm. Oh, he's a clever man! What should I fear, ma'am?" answered Martha, with a horrid simplicity.

"You have belonged to a very religious sect, I think I have heard you say—a sect not unfamiliar to me—a sect to which great crime is very rarely known?"

"Yes, ma'am, some of 'em be tame enough, but others be weel[2] deep!"

"You do not believe what they taught you?"

"I did, when I was young and silly."

[1] "If Riving Pike do wear a hood,
The day, be sure, will ne'er be good."
A Lancashire Distich.

[2] Weel,—whirlpool.

"And what disturbed your belief?"

"Ma'am, the man what taught me, and my mother afore me, was the first I ever kep company with," answered Martha, without a change in her florid hue, which seemed fixed in her cheek; as the red in an autumn leaf. "After he had ruined me, as the girls say, he told me as how it was all sham!"

"You loved him, then?"

"The man was well enough, ma'am, and he behaved handsome, and got me a husband. I've known better days."

"You sleep well at night?"

"Yes, ma'am, thank you, I loves my bed."

"I have done with you," said Madame Dalibard, stifling a groan, as now, placed in her bed, she turned to the wall. Martha extinguished the candle, leaving it on the table by the bed, with a book and a box of matches, for Madame Dalibard was a bad sleeper, and often read in the night. She then drew the curtains, and went her way.

It might be an hour after Martha had retired to rest, that a hand was stretched from the bed, that the candle was lighted, and Lucretia Dalibard rose; with a sudden movement she threw aside the coverings, and stood in her long night-gear on the floor. Yes, the helpless, paralysed cripple rose—was on her feet—tall, elastic, erect! It was as a resuscitation from the grave. Never was change more startling than that simple action effected —not in the form alone, but the whole character of the face. The solitary light streamed upward on a countenance on every line of which spoke sinister power and strong resolve. If you had ever seen her before in her false, crippled state, prostrate and helpless, and could have seen her then—those eyes, if haggard still, now full of life and vigour—that frame, if spare, towering aloft in commanding stature, perfect in its proportions as a Grecian image of Nemesis—your amaze would have merged into terror, so preternatural did the transformation appear!—so did aspect and bearing contradict the very character of her sex; uniting the two elements most formidable in man or in fiend —wickedness and power.

She stood a moment motionless, breathing loud, as if it were a joy to breathe free from restraint, and then, lifting the light,

and gliding to the adjoining room, she unlocked a bureau in the corner, and bent over a small casket, which she opened with a secret spring.

Reader, cast back your eye to that passage in this history, when Lucretia Clavering took down the volume from the niche in the tapestried chamber at Laughton, and numbered, in thought, the hours left to her uncle's life. Look back on the ungrateful thought—behold, how it has swelled and ripened into the guilty deed! There, in that box, Death guards his treasure crypt. There, all the science of Hades numbers its murderous inventions. As she searched for the ingredients her design had pre-selected, something heavier than those small packets she deranged fell to the bottom of the box with a low and hollow sound. She started at the noise, and then smiled, in scorn of her momentary fear, as she took up the ring that had occasioned the sound—a ring plain and solid, like those used as signets in the Middle Ages, with a large dull opal in the centre. What secret could that bauble have in common with its ghastly companions in Death's crypt? This had been found amongst Olivier's papers; a note in that precious manuscript, which had given to the hands of his successors the keys of the grave, had discovered the mystery of its uses. By the pressure of the hand, at the touch of a concealed spring, a barbed point flew forth steeped in venom, more deadly than the Indian extracts from the bag of the cobra capella,—a venom to which no antidote is known, which no test can detect. It corrupts the whole mass of the blood—it mounts in frenzy and fire to the brain—it rends the soul from the body in spasm and convulsion. But examine the dead, and how divine the effect of the cause?—how go back to the records of the Borgias, and amidst all the scepticisms of times in which, happily, such arts are unknown, unsuspected, learn from the hero of Machiavel how a clasp of the hand can get rid of a foe! Easier and more natural to point to the living puncture in the skin, and the swollen flesh round it, and dilate on the danger a rusty nail—nay, a pin, can engender—when the humours are peccant, and the blood is impure! The fabrication of that bauble, the discovery of Borgia's device, was the masterpiece in the

science of Dalibard; a curious and philosophical triumph of research, hitherto unused by its inventor and his heirs; for that casket is rich in the choice of more gentle materials; but the use yet may come. As she gazed on the ring, there was a complacent and proud expression on Lucretia's face.

"Dumb token of Cæsar Borgia!" she murmured—"him of the wisest head and the boldest hand that ever grasped at empire;—whom Machiavel, the virtuous, rightly praised as the model of accomplished ambition! Why should I falter in the paths which he trod with his royal step, only because my goal is not a throne? Every circle is as complete in itself, whether rounding a globule or a star. Why groan in the belief that the mind defiles itself by the darkness through which it glides on its object, or the mire through which it ascends to the hill? Murderer as he was, poisoner, and fratricide—did blood clog his intellect? or crime impoverish the luxury of his genius? Was his verse less melodious,[1] or his love of art less intense, or his eloquence less persuasive, because he sought to remove every barrier, revenge every wrong, crush every foe?"

In the wondrous corruption to which her mind had descended, thus murmured Lucretia. Intellect had been so long made her sole god, that the very monster of history was lifted to her reverence by his ruthless intellect alone; lifted, in that mood of feverish excitement, when conscience, often less silenced, lay crushed under the load of the deed to come, into an example and a guide.

Though, at times, when looking back, oppressed by the blackest despair, no remorse of the past ever weakened those nerves, when the Hour called up its demon, and the Will ruled the rest of the human being as a machine.

She replaced the ring—she reclosed the casket, relocked its depository; then passed again into the adjoining chamber.

A few minutes afterwards and the dim light that stole from the heavens (in which the moon was partially overcast), through the casement on the staircase, rested on a shapeless

[1] It is well known that Cæsar Borgia was both a munificent patron and an exquisite appreciater of art—well known also are his powers of persuasion; but the general reader may not perhaps be acquainted with the fact, that this terrible criminal was also a poet.

figure, robed in black from head to foot—a figure so obscure and undefinable in outline, so suited to the gloom in its hue, so stealthy and rapid in its movements, that, had you started from sleep, and seen it on your floor, you would, perforce, have deemed that your fancy had befooled you!

Thus darkly, through the darkness, went the Poisoner to her prey.

CHAPTER XVIII.

RETROSPECT.

We have now arrived at that stage in this history when it is necessary to look back on the interval in Lucretia's life—between the death of Dalibard, and her reintroduction, in the second portion of our tale.

One day, without previous notice or warning, Lucretia arrived at William Mainwaring's house; she was in the deep weeds of widowhood, and that garb of mourning sufficed to add Susan's tenderest commiseration to the warmth of her affectionate welcome. Lucretia appeared to have forgiven the past, and to have conquered its more painful recollections: she was gentle to Susan, though she rather suffered than returned her caresses; she was open and frank to William. Both felt inexpressibly grateful for her visit—the forgiveness it betokened, and the confidence it implied. At this time, no condition could be more promising and prosperous than that of the young banker. From the first, the most active partner in the bank, he had now virtually almost monopolised the business. The senior partner was old and infirm; the second had a bucolic turn, and was much taken up by the care of a large farm he had recently purchased; so that Mainwaring, more and more trusted and honoured, became the sole managing administrator of the firm. Business throve in his able hands; and with patient and steady perseverance there was little doubt but what, before middle age was attained, his competence would have swelled into a fortune sufficient

to justify him in realising the secret dream of his heart—the parliamentary representation of the town in which he had already secured the affection and esteem of the inhabitants.

It was not long before Lucretia detected the ambition William's industry but partially concealed; it was not long before, with the ascendency natural to her will and her talents, she began to exercise considerable, though unconscious, influence over a man in whom a thousand good qualities, and some great talents, were unhappily accompanied by infirm purpose and weak resolutions. The ordinary conversation of Lucretia unsettled his mind and inflamed his vanity—a conversation able, aspiring, full, both of knowledge drawn from books, and of that experience of public men which her residence in Paris (whereon, with its new and greater Charlemagne, the eyes of the world were turned) had added to her acquisitions in the lore of human life. Nothing more disturbs a mind like William Mainwaring's than that species of eloquence which rebukes its patience in the present, by inflaming all its hopes in the future. Lucretia had none of the charming babble of women—none of that tender interest in household details in the minutiæ of domestic life, which relaxes the intellect while softening the heart. Hard and vigorous, her sentences came forth in eternal appeal to the reason, or address to the sterner passions in which love has no share. Beside this strong thinker, poor Susan's sweet talk seemed frivolous and inane. Her soft hold upon Mainwaring loosened. He ceased to consult her upon business—he began to repine that the partner of his lot could have little sympathy with his dreams—more often and more bitterly now did his discontented glance, in his way homeward, rove to the rooftops of the rural member for the town; more eagerly did he read the parliamentary debates—more heavily did he sigh at the thought of eloquence denied a vent, and ambition delayed in its career.

When arrived at this state of mind, Lucretia's conversation took a more worldly, a more practical turn. Her knowledge of the speculators of Paris instructed her pictures of bold ingenuity creating sudden wealth; she spoke of fortunes made in a day—

of *parvenus* bursting into millionaires—of wealth as the necessary instrument of ambition as the arch ruler of the civilised world. Never once, be it observed, in these temptations, did Lucretia address herself to the heart—the ordinary channels of vulgar seduction were disdained by her; she would not have stooped so low as Mainwaring's love, could she have commanded or allured it; she was willing to leave to Susan the husband reft from her own passionate youth, but leave him with the brand on his brow and the worm at his heart—a scoff and a wreck.

At this time, there was in that market-town one of those adventurous speculative men, who are the more dangerous impostors, because imposed upon by their own sanguine chimeras, who have a plausibility in their calculations, an earnestness in their arguments, which account for the dupes they daily make in our most sober and wary of civilised communities. Unscrupulous in their means, yet really honest in the belief that their objects can be attained, they are at once the rogues and fanatics of Mammon! This person was held to have been fortunate in some adroit speculations in the corn trade, and he was brought too frequently into business with Mainwaring not to be a frequent visitor at the house. In him, Lucretia saw the very instrument of her design, she led him on to talk of business as a game—of money as a realiser of cent. per cent.—she drew him into details—she praised him, she admired. In his presence she seemed only to hear him—in his absence, musingly, she started from silence to exclaim on the acuteness of his genius and the accuracy of his figures. Soon the tempter at Mainwaring's heart gave signification to these praises soon this adventurer became his most intimate friend. Scarcely knowing why, never ascribing the change to her sister, poor Susan wept, amazed at Mainwaring's transformation—no care now for the new books from London, or the roses in the garden!—the music on the instrument was unheeded! Books, roses, music!—what are those trifles to a man thinking upon cent. per cent.? Mainwaring's very countenance altered—it lost its frank, affectionate beauty;—sullen, abstracted, morose—it showed that some great care was at the core. Then Lucretia herself began grievingly to notice the change to Susan—

gradually she altered her tone with regard to the speculator, and hinted vague fears, and urged Susan's remonstrance and warning. As she had anticipated, warning and remonstrance came in vain to the man, who, comparing Lucretia's mental power to Susan's, had learned to despise the unlearned timid sense of the latter.

It is unnecessary to trace this change in Mainwaring step by step, or to measure the time which sufficed to dazzle his reason and blind his honour. In the midst of schemes and hopes which the lust of gold now pervaded, came a thunderbolt. An anonymous letter to the head partner of the bank provoked suspicions that led to minute examination of the accounts. It seemed that sums had been irregularly advanced (upon bills drawn by men of straw) to the speculator by Mainwaring; and the destination of these sums could be traced to gambling operations in trade, in which Mainwaring had a private interest and partnership. So great, as we have said, had been the confidence placed in William's abilities and honour, that the facilities afforded him, in the disposal of the joint stock, far exceeded those usually granted to the partner of a firm, and the breach of trust appeared the more flagrant from the extent of the confidence misplaced. Meanwhile, William Mainwaring, though as yet unconscious of the proceedings of his partners, was gnawed by anxiety and remorse, not unmixed with hope. He depended upon the result of a bold speculation in the purchase of shares in a Canal Company, a bill for which was then before Parliament, with (as he was led to believe) a certainty of success. The sums he had, on his own responsibility, abstracted from the joint account were devoted to this adventure. But, to do him justice, he never dreamed of appropriating the profits anticipated to himself. Though knowing that the bills on which the moneys had been advanced were merely nominal deposits, he had confidently calculated on the certainty of success for the speculations, to which the proceeds so obtained were devoted, and he looked forward to the moment when he might avow what he had done, and justify it by doubling the capital withdrawn. But to his inconceivable horror, the bill of the Canal Company was rejected in the Lords — the shares

bought at a premium went down to zero; and, to add to his perplexity the speculator abruptly disappeared from the town. In this crisis, he was summoned to meet his indignant associates.

The evidence against him was morally damning, if not legally conclusive. The unhappy man heard all in the silence of despair. Crushed and bewildered, he attempted no defence. He asked but an hour to sum up the losses of the bank, and his own; they amounted within a few hundreds to the ten thousand pounds he had brought to the firm, and which, in the absence of marriage-settlements, was entirely at his own disposal. This sum he at once resigned to his associates, on condition that they should defray from it his personal liabilities. The money thus repaid, his partners naturally relinquished all further inquiry. They were moved by pity for one so gifted and so fallen—they even offered him a subordinate, but lucrative situation, in the firm in which he had been partner; but Mainwaring wanted the patience and resolution to work back the redemption of his name—perhaps, ultimately of his fortunes. In the fatal anguish of his shame and despair, he fled from the town; his flight confirmed for ever the rumours against him—rumours worse than the reality. It was long before he even admitted Susan to the knowledge of the obscure refuge he had sought; there, at length, she joined him. Meanwhile, what did Lucretia?—she sold nearly half of her own fortune, constituted principally of the moiety of her portion which, at Dalibard's death, had passed to herself as survivor, and partly of the share in her deceased husband's effects, which the French law awarded to her; and with the proceeds of this sum she purchased an annuity for her victims! Was this strange generosity the act of mercy—the result of repentance? No; it was one of the not least subtle and delicious refinements of her revenge. To know him who had rejected her—the rival who had supplanted—the miserable pensioners of her bounty, was dear to her haughty and disdainful hate. The lust of power, ever stronger in her than avarice, more than reconciled her to the sacrifice of gold;—yes, here, she, the despised, the degraded—had power still;—her wrath had ruined the fortunes of her victim, blasted the repute, embittered and desolated evermore the future,—now

her contemptuous charity fed the wretched lives that she spared in scorn. She had no small difficulty, it is true, in persuading Susan to accept this sacrifice, and she did so only by sustaining her sister's belief that the past could yet be retrieved—that Mainwaring's energies could yet rebuild their fortunes,—and that as the annuity was at any time redeemable, the aid therefore was only temporary. With this understanding, Susan, overwhelmed with gratitude, weeping and broken-hearted, departed to join the choice of her youth. As the men, deputed by the auctioneer to arrange and ticket the furniture for sale, entered the desolate house, Lucretia then, with the step of a conqueror, passed from the threshold.

"Ah!" she murmured, as she paused, and gazed on the walls —"ah, they were happy when I first entered those doors!—happy in each other's tranquil love—happier still, when they deemed I had forgiven the wrong, and abjured the past! How honoured was then their home! How knew I then, for the first time, what the home of love can be! and who had destroyed for me, upon all the earth, a home like theirs?—they on whom that home smiled with its serene and taunting peace!—I—I, the guest! I—I, the abandoned!—the betrayed—what dark memories were on my soul! what a hell boiled within my bosom!—Well might those memories take each a voice to accuse them!—well, from that hell, might rise the Alecto! Their lives were in my power!—my fatal dowry at my command —rapid death, or slow consuming torture;—but to have seen each cheer the other to the grave, lighting every downward step with the eyes of love—vengeance, so urged, would have fallen only on myself! Ha! deceiver, didst thou plume thyself, forsooth, on spotless reputation?—didst thou stand, *me* by thy side, amongst thy perjured household gods, and talk of honour? Thy home—it is reft from thee!—thy reputation, it is a scoff—thine honour, it is a ghost that shall haunt thee! Thy love, can it linger yet? Shall the soft eyes of thy wife not burn into thy heart, and shame turn love into loathing? Wrecks of my vengeance—minions of my bounty—I did well to let ye live; I shake the dust from my feet on your threshold;—live on—homeless, hopeless, and childless! The curse is fulfilled!"

From that hour Lucretia never paused from her career to inquire further of her victims; she never entered into communication with either. They knew not her address, nor her fate, nor she theirs. As she had reckoned, Mainwaring made no effort to recover himself from his fall. All the high objects that had lured his ambition were gone from him evermore. No place in the state, no authority in the senate, awaits in England the man with a blighted name. For the lesser objects of life he had no heart and no care. They lived in obscurity in a small village in Cornwall, till the Peace allowed them to remove to France. The rest of their fate is known.

Meanwhile, Lucretia removed to one of those smaller Londons—resorts of pleasure and idleness, with which rich England abounds, and in which widows of limited income can make poverty seem less plebeian. And now, to all those passions that had hitherto raged within her, a dismal apathy succeeded. It was the great calm in her sea of life. The winds fell, and the sails drooped. Her vengeance satisfied, that which she had made so preternaturally the main object of existence, once fulfilled, left her in youth objectless.

She strove at first to take pleasure in the society of the place, but its frivolities and pettiness of purpose soon wearied that masculine and grasping mind, already made insensible to the often healthful, often innocent, excitement of trifles, by the terrible ordeal it had passed. Can the touch of the hand, scorched by the burning iron, feel pleasure in the softness of silk, or the light down of the cygnet's plume? She next sought such relief as study could afford; and her natural bent of thought, and her desire to vindicate her deeds to herself, plunged her into the fathomless abyss of metaphysical inquiry, with the hope to confirm into positive assurance her earlier scepticism—with the atheist's hope to annihilate the soul, and banish the presiding God. But no voice that could satisfy her reason came from those dreary deeps: contradiction on contradiction met her in the maze. Only when, wearied with book-lore, she turned her eyes to the visible nature, and beheld everywhere harmony, order, system, contrivance, art, did she start with the amaze and awe of instinctive conviction; and

the natural religion revolted from her cheerless ethics! Then came one of those sudden reactions common with strong passions and exploring minds—but more common with women, however manlike, than with men. Had she lived in Italy then, she had become a nun! For in this woman, unlike Varney and Dalibard, the conscience could never be utterly silenced. In her choice of evil, she found only torture to her spirit in all the respites afforded to the occupations it indulged. When employed upon ill, remorse gave way to the zest of scheming; when the ill was done, remorse came with the repose.

It was in this peculiar period of her life, that Lucretia, turning everywhere, and desperately, for escape from the past, became acquainted with some members of one of the most rigid of the sects of dissent. At first, she permitted herself to know and commune with these persons from a kind of contemptuous curiosity; she desired to encourage, in contemplating them, her experience of the follies of human nature; but in that crisis of her mind, in those struggles of her reason, whatever showed that which she most yearned to discover—viz., earnest faith, rooted and genuine conviction, whether of annihilation or of immortality—a philosophy that might reconcile her to crime by destroying the providence of good, or a creed that could hold out the hope of redeeming the past, and exorcising sin by the mystery of a Divine sacrifice,—had over her a power which she had not imagined or divined. Gradually the intense convictions of her new associates disturbed and infected her. Their affirmations, that as we are born in wrath, so sin is our second nature, our mysterious heritage, seemed, to her understanding, willing to be blinded, to imply excuses for her past misdeeds. Their assurances that the worst sinner may become the most earnest saint—that through but one act of the will, resolute faith, all redemption is to be found,—these affirmations and these assurances, which have so often restored the guilty, and remodelled the human heart, made a salutary, if brief, impression upon her. Nor were the lives of these dissenters (for the most part, austerely moral), nor the peace and self-complacency

which they evidently found in the satisfaction of conscience and fulfilment of duty, without an influence over her, that for a while, both chastened and soothed.

Hopeful of such a convert, the good teachers strove hard to confirm the seeds springing up from the granite and amidst the weeds; and amongst them came one man more eloquent, more seductive than the rest, Alfred Braddell. This person, a trader at Liverpool, was one of those strange living paradoxes that can rarely be found out of a commercial community. He himself had been a convert to the sect, and like most converts, he pushed his enthusiasm into the bigotry of the zealot. He saw no salvation out of the pale into which he had entered; but though his belief was sincere, it did not genially operate on his practical life; with the most scrupulous attention to forms, he had the worldliness and cunning of the carnal. He had abjured the vices of the softer senses, but not that which so seldom wars on the decorums of outer life. He was essentially a money-maker—close, acute, keen, overreaching. Good works with him were indeed as nothing —faith, the all in all. He was one of the elect, and could not fall. Still, in this man there was all the intensity which often characterises a mind in proportion to the narrowness of its compass; that intensity gave fire to his gloomy eloquence, and strength to his obstinate will. He saw Lucretia, and his zeal for her conversion soon expanded into love for her person; yet that love was secondary to his covetousness. Though ostensibly in a flourishing business, he was greatly distressed for money to carry on operations which swelled beyond the reach of his capital; his fingers itched for the sum which Lucretia had still at her disposal; but the seeming sincerity of the man, the persuasion of his goodness, his reputation for sanctity, deceived her; she believed herself honestly and ardently beloved, and by one who could guide her back, if not to happiness, at least to repose. She herself loved him not—she could love no more. But it seemed to her a luxury to find some one she could trust, she could honour. If you had probed into the recesses of her mind at that time, you would have found that no religious belief was there settled—only

the desperate *wish* to believe,—only the disturbance of all previous infidelity,—only a restless gnawing desire to escape from memory, to emerge from the gulf. In this troubled, impatient, disorder of mind and feeling, she hurried into a second marriage as fatal as the first.

For a while she bore patiently all the privations of that ascetic household; assisted in all those external formalities, centred all her intellect within that iron range of existence. But no grace descended on her soul—no warm ray unlocked the ice of the well. Then, gradually becoming aware of the niggardly meanness, of the harsh uncharitable judgments, of the decorous frauds that, with unconscious hypocrisy, her husband concealed beneath the robes of sanctity, a weary disgust stole over her,—it stole, it deepened, it increased; it became intolerable, when she discovered that Braddell had knowingly deceived her as to his worldly substance. In that mood in which she had rushed into these ominous nuptials, she had had no thought for vulgar advantages; had Braddell been a beggar, she had married him as rashly. But he, with the inability to comprehend a nature like hers—dim not more to her terrible vices than to the sinister grandeur which made their ordinary atmosphere,—had descended cunningly to address the avarice he thought as potent in others as himself,—to enlarge on the worldly prosperity with which Providence had blessed him; and now she saw that her dowry alone had saved the crippled trader from the bankrupt list. With this revolting discovery,—with the scorn it produced, vanished all Lucretia's unstable visions of reform. She saw this man a saint amongst his tribe, and would not believe in the virtues of his brethren, great and unquestionable as they might have been proved to a more dispassionate and humbler inquirer. The imposture she detected, she deemed universal in the circle in which she dwelt; and Satan once more smiled upon the subject he regained. Lucretia became a mother—but their child formed no endearing tie between the ill-assorted pair; it rather embittered their discord. Dimly, even then, as she bent over the cradle, that vision which now, in the old house at Brompton, haunted her dreams, and beckoned her over

seas of blood into the fancied future, was foreshadowed in the face of her infant son. To be born again in that birth, —to live only in that life,—to aspire as man may aspire, in that future man whom she would train to knowledge, and lead to power — these were the feelings with which that sombre mother gazed upon her babe. The idea that the low-born grovelling father had the sole right over that son's destiny, had the authority to cabin his mind in the walls of form, bind him down to the sordid apprenticeship, debased, not dignified, by the solemn mien, roused her indignant wrath —she sickened when Braddell touched her child. All her pride of intellect, that had never slept—all her pride of birth, long dormant, woke up to protect the heir of her ambition, the descendant of her race, from the defilement of the father's nurture. Not long after her confinement, she formed a plan for escape—she disappeared from the house with her child. Taking refuge in a cottage, living on the sale of the few jewels she possessed, she was for some weeks almost happy. But Braddell, less grieved by the loss than shocked by the scandal, was indefatigable in his researches — he discovered her retreat. The scene between them was terrible. There was no resisting the power which all civilised laws give to the rights of husband and father. Before this man, whom she scorned so unutterably, Lucretia was impotent. Then all the boiling passions long suppressed beneath that command of temper, which she owed both to habitual simulation and intense disdain, rushed forth. Then she appalled the impostor with her indignant denunciations of his hypocrisy, his meanness, and his guile. Then, throwing off the mask she had worn, she hurled her anathema on his sect, on his faith, with the same breath that smote his conscience, and left it wordless. She shocked all the notions he sincerely entertained, and he stood awed by accusations from a blasphemer whom he dared not rebuke. His rage broke at length from his awe. Stung, maddened by the scorn of himself, his blood fired into juster indignation by her scoff at his creed, he lost all self-possession, and struck her to the ground. In the midst of shame, and dread at disclosure of his violence, which succeeded the

act so provoked, he was not less relieved than amazed when Lucretia, rising slowly, laid her hand gently on his arm, and said, "Repent not, it is passed; fear not, I will be silent! Come, you are the stronger—you prevail. I will follow my child to your home."

In this unexpected submission in one so imperious, Braddell's imperfect comprehension of character saw but fear, and his stupidity exulted in his triumph. Lucretia returned with him. A few days afterwards Braddell became ill, the illness increased—slow, gradual, wearying. It broke his spirit with his health; and then the steadfast imperiousness of Lucretia's stern will ruled and subjugated him. He cowered beneath her haughty, searching gaze, he shivered at her sidelong, malignant glance; but with this fear came necessarily hate; and this hate, sometimes sufficing to vanquish the fear, spitefully evinced itself in thwarting her legitimate control over her infant. He would have it (though he had little real love for children) constantly with him, and affected to contradict all her own orders to the servants, in the sphere in which mothers arrogate most the right. Only on these occasions sometimes would Lucretia lose her grim self-control, and threaten that her child yet should be emancipated from his hands—should yet be taught the scorn for hypocrites which he had taught herself. These words sank deep, not only in the resentment, but in the conscience of the husband. Meanwhile, Lucretia scrupled not to evince her disdain of Braddell, by markedly abstaining from all the ceremonies she had before so rigidly observed. The sect grew scandalised. Braddell did not abstain from making known his causes of complaint. The haughty, imperious woman was condemned in the community, and hated in the household.

It was at this time that Walter Ardworth, who was then striving to eke out his means by political lectures (which in the earlier part of the century found ready audience) in our great towns, came to Liverpool. Braddell and Ardworth had been schoolfellows, and even at school, embryo politicians of congenial notions; and the conversion of the former to one of the sects which had grown out of the old creeds, that, under

Cromwell, had broken the sceptre of the son of Belial, and established the Commonwealth of Saints, had only strengthened the republican tenets of the sour fanatic. Ardworth called on Braddell, and was startled to find in his schoolfellow's wife the niece of his benefactor, Sir Miles St. John. Now, Lucretia had never divulged her true parentage to her husband. In a union so much beneath her birth, she had desired to conceal from all her connections the fall of the once-honoured heiress. She had descended, in search of peace, to obscurity; but her pride revolted from the thought, that her low-born husband might boast of her connections, and parade her descent to his level. Fortunately, as she thought, she received Ardworth before he was admitted to her husband, who now, growing feebler and feebler, usually kept his room. She stooped to beseech Ardworth not to reveal her secret, and he, comprehending her pride, as a man well-born himself, and pitying her pain, readily gave his promise. At the first interview, Braddell evinced no pleasure in the sight of his old schoolfellow. It was natural enough that one so precise should be somewhat revolted by one so careless of all form. But when Lucretia imprudently evinced satisfaction at his surly remarks on his visitor—when he perceived that it would please her that he should not cultivate the acquaintance offered him—he was moved by the spirit of contradiction, and the spiteful delight even in frivolous annoyance to conciliate and court the intimacy he had at first disdained: and then, by degrees, sympathy in political matters and old recollections of sportive, careless boyhood, cemented the intimacy into a more familiar bond than the sectarian had contracted really with any of his late associates.

Lucretia regarded this growing friendship with great uneasiness—the uneasiness increased to alarm, when one day, in the presence of Ardworth, Braddell, writhing with a sudden spasm, said—"I cannot account for these strange seizures—I think verily I am poisoned!"—and his dull eye rested on Lucretia's pallid brow. She was unusually thoughtful for some days after this remark, and one morning she informed her husband that she had received the intelligence that a relation, from whom she had pecuniary

expectations, was dangerously ill, and requested his permission to visit this sick kinsman, who dwelt in a distant county. Braddell's eyes brightened at the thought of her absence; with little further questioning he consented; and Lucretia, sure perhaps that the barb was in the side of her victim, and reckoning, it may be, on greater freedom from suspicion if her husband died in her absence, left the house. It was, indeed, to the neighbourhood of her kindred that she went. In a private conversation with Ardworth, when questioning him of his news of the present possessor of Laughton, he had informed her, that he had heard accidentally that Vernon's two sons (Percival was not then born) were sickly; and she went into Hampshire, secretly and unknown, to see what were really the chances that her son might yet become the lord of her lost inheritance.

During this absence, Braddell, now gloomily aware that his days were numbered, resolved to put into practice the idea long contemplated, and even less favoured by his spite than justified by the genuine convictions of his conscience. Whatever his faults, sincere at least in his religious belief, he might well look with dread to the prospect of the training and education his son would receive from the hands of a mother who had blasphemed his sect, and openly proclaimed her infidelity. By will, it is true, he might create a trust, and appoint guardians to his child But to have lived under the same roof with his wife—nay, to have carried her back to that roof when she had left it, afforded tacit evidence that whatever the disagreement between them, her conduct could hardly have merited her exclusion from the privileges of a mother. The guardianship might therefore avail little to frustrate Lucretia's indirect contamination, if not her positive control. Beside, where guardians are appointed money must be left; and Braddell knew that at his death his assets would be found insufficient for his debts. Who would be guardian to a penniless infant? He resolved, therefore, to send his child from his roof, to some place where, if reared humbly, it might at least be brought up in the right faith—some place which might defy the search and be beyond the perversion of the unbelieving mother. He looked round, and

discovered no instrument for his purpose that seemed so ready as Walter Ardworth; for by this time he had thoroughly excited the pity and touched the heart of that good-natured, easy man. His representations of the misconduct of Lucretia were the more implicitly believed by one who had always been secretly prepossessed against her—who, admitted to household intimacy, was an eyewitness to her hard indifference to her husband's sufferings—who saw in her very request not to betray her gentle birth, the shame she felt in her election—who regarded with indignation her unfeeling desertion of Braddell, in his last moments, and who, besides all this, had some private misfortunes of his own, which made him the more ready listener to themes on the faults of women, and had already, by mutual confidences, opened the hearts of the two ancient schoolfellows to each other's complaints and wrongs. The only other *confidante* in the refuge selected for the child, was a member of the same community as Braddell, who kindly undertook to search for a pious, godly woman, who, upon such pecuniary considerations as Braddell, by robbing his creditors, could afford to bestow, would permanently offer to the poor infant a mother's home and a mother's care. When this woman was found, Braddell confided his child to Ardworth, with such a sum as he could scrape together for its future maintenance. And to Ardworth, rather than to his fellow-sectarian, this double trust was given, because the latter feared scandal and misrepresentation, if he should be ostensibly mixed up in so equivocal a charge. Poor and embarrassed as Walter Ardworth was, Braddell did not for once misinterpret character when he placed the money in his hands; and this because the characters we have known in transparent boyhood we have known for ever. Ardworth was reckless, and his whole life had been wrecked—his whole nature materially degraded—by the want of common thrift and prudence. His own money slipt through his fingers, and left him surrounded by creditors, whom, rigidly speaking he thus defrauded; but direct dishonesty was as wholly out of the chapter of his vices, as if he had been a man of the strictest principles and the steadiest honour.

The child was gone—the father died—Lucretia returned, as

we have seen in Grabman's letter, to the house of death, to meet suspicion and cold looks, and menial accusations, and an inquest on the dead: but through all this the reft tigress mourned her stolen whelp. As soon as all evidence against her was proved legally groundless, and she had leave to depart, she searched blindly and frantically for her lost child; but in vain. The utter and penniless destitution in which she was left by her husband's decease did not suffice to terminate her maddening chase. On foot she wandered from village to village, and begged her way, wherever a false clue misled her steps.

At last, in reluctant despair, she resigned the pursuit, and found herself one day in the midst of the streets of London, half-famished and in rags; and before her suddenly, now grown into vigorous youth—blooming, sleek, and seemingly prosperous—stood Gabriel Varney. By her voice, as she approached and spoke, he recognised his stepmother; and, after a short pause of hesitation, he led her to his home. It is not our purpose (for it is not necessary to those passages of their lives from which we have selected the thread of our tale) to follow these two, thus united, through their general career of spoliation and crime. Birds of prey, they searched in human follies and human errors for their food: sometimes severed, sometimes together, their interests remained one. Varney profited by the mightier and subtler genius of evil to which he had leashed himself; for, caring little for luxuries, and dead to the softer senses, she abandoned to him readily the larger share of their plunder. Under a variety of names and disguises, through a succession of frauds, some vast and some mean, but chiefly on the Continent, they had pursued their course, eluding all danger, and baffling all law.

Between three and four years before this period, Varney's uncle, the painter, by one of those unexpected caprices of fortune which sometimes find heirs to a millionaire at the weaver's loom or the labourer's plough, had suddenly, by the death of a very distant kinsman, whom he had never seen, come into possession of a small estate, which he sold for 6,000*l.* Retiring from his profession, he lived as comfortably as his shattered constitution permitted upon the interest of

this sum; and he wrote to his nephew, then at Paris, to communicate the good news, and offer the hospitality of his hearth. Varney hastened to London. Shortly afterwards a nurse recommended as an experienced, useful person in her profession, by Nicholas Grabman, who, in many a tortuous scheme, had been Gabriel's confederate, was installed in the poor painter's house From that time his infirmities increased. He died, as his doctor said, "by abstaining from the stimulants to which his constitution had been so long accustomed;" and Gabriel Varney was summoned to the reading of the will. To his inconceivable disappointment, instead of bequeathing to his nephew the free disposal of his 6,000*l.*, that sum was assigned to trustees for the benefit of Gabriel and his children yet unborn: "An inducement," said the poor testator, tenderly, "for the boy to marry and reform!" So that the nephew could only enjoy the interest, and had no control over the capital. The interest of 6,000*l.* invested in the Bank of England, was *flocci, nauci* to the voluptuous spendthrift, Gabriel Varney!

Now, these trustees were selected from the painter's earlier and more respectable associates, who had dropped him, it is true, in his days of beggary and disrepute, but whom the fortune that made him respectable had again conciliated. One of these trustees had lately retired to pass the remainder of his days at Boulogne;—the other was a hypochondriacal valetudinarian; neither of them, in short, a man of business. Gabriel was left to draw out the interest of the money, as it became periodically due at the Bank of England. In a few months, the trustee settled at Boulogne died—the trust, of course, lapsed to Mr. Stubmore, the valetudinarian survivor. Soon pinched by extravagances, and emboldened by the character and helpless state of the surviving trustee, Varney forged Mr. Stubmore's signature to an order on the Bank, to sell out such portion of the capital as his wants required. The impunity of one offence begot courage for others, till the whole was well nigh expended. Upon these sums Varney had lived very pleasantly, and he saw with a deep sigh the approaching failure of so facile a resource.

In one of the melancholy moods engendered by this reflection

Varney happened to be in the very town in France in which the Mainwarings, in their later years, had taken refuge, and from which Helen had been removed to the roof of Mr. Fielden. By accident he heard the name, and, his curiosity leading to further inquiries, learned that Helen was made an heiress by the will of her grandfather. With this knowledge came a thought of the most treacherous, the most miscreant and the vilest crime, that even *he* yet had perpetrated; so black was it, that for a while he absolutely struggled against it. But in guilt there seems ever a Necessity, that urges on step after step—to the last consummation. Varney received a letter to inform him that the last surviving trustee was no more, that the trust was, therefore, now centred in his son and heir, that that gentleman was at present very busy in settling his own affairs, and examining into a very mismanaged property in Devonshire, which had devolved upon him; but that he hoped in a few months to discharge, more efficiently than his father had done, the duties of trustee; and that some more profitable investment than the Bank of England would probably occur.

This new trustee was known personally to Varney—a contemporary of his own, and, in earlier youth, a pupil to his uncle. But, since then, he had made way in life, and retired from the Profession of Art. This younger Stubmore he knew to be a bustling, officious man of business—somewhat greedy and covetous, but withal somewhat weak of purpose, good-natured in the main, and with a little lukewarm kindness for Gabriel, as a quondam fellow-pupil. That Stubmore would discover the fraud was evident—that he would declare it, for his own sake, was evident also—that the Bank would prosecute—that Varney would be convicted, was no less surely to be apprehended. There was only one chance left to the forger—if he could get into his hands, and in time, before Stubmore's bustling interference, a sum sufficient to replace what had been fraudulently taken—he might easily manage, he thought, to prevent the forgery ever becoming known. Nay, if Stubmore, roused into strict personal investigation, by the new power of attorney, which a new investment in the Bank would render necessary, should ascertain what had occurred, his liabilities being now

indemnified, and the money replaced, Varney thought he could confidently rely on his *ci-devant* fellow-pupil's assent to wink at the forgery, and hush up the matter. But this was his only chance. How was the money to be gained? He thought of Helen's fortune, and the last scruple gave way to the imminence of his peril, and the urgency of his fears.

With this decision, he repaired to Lucretia, whose concurrence was necessary to his designs. Long habits of crime had now deepened still more the dark and stern colour of that dread woman's sombre nature. But through all that had ground the humanity from her soul, one human sentiment, fearfully tainted and adulterated as it was, still struggled for life—the memory of the mother. It was, by this, her least criminal emotion, that Varney led her to the worst of her crimes. He offered to sell out the remainder of the trust-money by a fresh act of forgery—to devote such proceeds to the search for her lost Vincent; he revived the hopes she had long since gloomily relinquished, till she began to conceive the discovery easy and certain. He then brought before her the prospect of that son's succession to Laughton—but two lives now between him and those broad lands—those two lives, associated with just cause of revenge!—*two* lives! Lucretia, till then, did not know that Susan had left a child—that a pledge of those nuptials, to which she imputed all her infamy, existed to revive a jealousy never extinguished, appeal to the hate that had grown out of her love. More readily than Varney had anticipated, and with fierce exultation, she fell into his horrible schemes.

Thus had she returned to England, and claimed the guardianship of her niece. Varney engaged a dull house in the suburb, and looking out for a servant, not likely to upset and betray, found the nurse who had watched over his uncle's last illness: but Lucretia, according to her invariable practice, rejected all menial accomplices—reposed no confidence in the tools of her black deeds. Feigning an infirmity that would mock all suspicion of the hand that mixed the draught, and the step that stole to the slumber, she defied the justice of earth, and stood alone under the omniscience of Heaven.

Various considerations had delayed the execution of the atrocious deed so coldly contemplated. Lucretia herself drew back ; perhaps more daunted by conscience than she herself was distinctly aware,—and disguising her scruples in those yet fouler refinements of hoped revenge which her conversations with Varney have betrayed to the reader. The failure of the earlier researches for the lost Vincent, the suspended activity of Stubmore, left the more impatient murderer leisure to make the acquaintance of St. John, steal into the confidence of Helen, and render the insurances on the life of the latter less open to suspicion than if effected immediately on her entrance into that shamble-house, and before she could be supposed to form that affection for her aunt which made probable so tender a forethought. These causes of delay now vanished, the Parcæ closed the abrupt woof, and lifted the impending shears.

Lucretia had long since dropped the name of Braddell. She shrank from proclaiming those second spousals, sullied by the degradation to which they had exposed her, and the suspicions implied in the inquest on her husband, until the hour for acknowledging her son should arrive. She resumed, therefore, the name of Dalibard, and by that we will continue to call her. Nor was Varney uninfluential in dissuading her from proclaiming her second marriage till occasion necessitated. If the son were discovered, and proofs of his birth in the keeping of himself and his accomplice, his avarice naturally suggested the expediency of wringing from that son some pledge of adequate reward on succession to an inheritance which they alone could secure to him : out of this fancied fund, not only Grabman, but his employer was to be paid. The concealment of the identity between Mrs. Braddell and Madame Dalibard might facilitate such an arrangement. This idea Varney locked as yet in his own breast. He did not dare to speak to Lucretia of the bargain he ultimately meditated with her son.

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. GRABMAN'S ADVENTURES.

THE lacqueys in their dress liveries stood at the porch of Laughton, as the postillions drove rapidly along the road, sweeping through venerable groves tinged with the hues of autumn, up to that stately pile. From the window of the large cumbrous vehicle, which Percival, mindful of Madame Dalibard's infirmity, had hired for her special accommodation, Lucretia looked keenly. On the slope of the hill grouped the deer, and below, where the lake gleamed, the swan rested on the wave. Farther on to the left, gaunt and stag-headed, rose, living still, from the depth of the glen, Guy's memorable oak. Coming now in sight, though at a distance, the grey church tower emerged from the surrounding masses of solemn foliage. Suddenly, the road curves round, and straight before her (the rooks cawing above the turrets, the sun reflected from the vanes) Lucretia gazes on the halls of Laughton. And didst thou not, O Guy's oak, murmur warning from thine oracular hollows? And thou, who sleepest below the church tower, didst thou not turn, Miles St. John, in thy grave, when, with such tender care, the young Lord of Laughton bore that silent guest across his threshold, and with credulous, moistened eyes, welcomed Treason and Murther to his hearth?

There, at the porch, paused Helen, gazing with the rapt eye of the poetess on the broad landscape, chequered by the vast shadows cast from the setting sun. There, too, by her side, lingered Varney, with an artist's eye for the stately scene, till a thought, not of art, changed the face of the earth, and the view without mirrored back the Golgotha of his soul.

Leave them thus—we must hurry on.

One day a traveller stopped his gig at a public-house in a village in Lancashire. He chucked the rein to the ostler, and in reply to a question what oats should be given to the horse, said —"Hay and water—the beast is on job." Then sauntering to

the bar, he called for a glass of raw brandy for himself; and while the host drew the spirit forth from the tap, he asked carelessly, if some years ago, a woman of the name of Joplin had not resided in the village?"

"It is strange," said the host, musingly.

"What is strange?"

"Why, we have just had a gent asking the same question. I have only been here nine year come December, but my old ostler was born in the village and never left it. So the gent had in the ostler, and he is now gone into the village to pick up what else he can learn."

This intelligence seemed to surprise and displease the traveller.

"What the deuce," he muttered, "does Jason mistrust me? Has he set another dog on the scent? Humph!" He drained off his brandy, and sallied forth to confer with the ostler.

"Well, my friend," said Mr. Grabman, for the traveller was no other than that worthy—"well, so you remember Mrs. Joplin more than twenty years ago—eh?"

"Yees, I guess; more than twenty years since she left the *Pleck*."[1]

"Ah, she seems to have been a restless body—she had a child with her!"

"Yees, I moind that."

"And I dare say you heard her say the child was not her own—that she was paid well for it, eh?"

"Noa; my missus did not loike me to chaffer much with neighbour Joplin, for she was but a bad 'un—pretty fease, too. She lived agin the *wogh*[2] yonder, where you see that gent coming out."

"Oho! that is the gent who was asking after Mrs. Joplin?"

"Yes; and he giv' me half-a-croon!" said the clever ostler, holding out his hand.

Mr. Grabman, too thoughtful, too jealous of his rival, to take the hint at that moment, darted off, as fast as his thin legs could carry him, towards the unwelcome interferer in his own business.

[1] *Pleck*,—Lancashire and Yorkshire, synonym for *place*.
[2] *Anglice*,—wall.

Approaching the gentleman—a tall, powerful-looking young man—he somewhat softened his tone, and mechanically touched his hat as he said—

"What, sir, are you, too, in search of Mrs. Joplin?"

"Sir, I am," answered the young man, eying Grabman deliberately; "and you, I suppose, are the person I have found before me on the same search—first, at Liverpool; next at C——, about fifteen miles from that town; thirdly, at L——; and now we meet here. You have had the start of me. What have you learned?"

Mr. Grabman smiled. "Softly, sir, softly. May I first ask (since open questioning seems the order of the day), whether I have the honour to address a brother practitioner—one of the law, sir—one of the law?"

"I am one of the law."

Mr. Grabman bowed and scowled.

"And may I make bold to ask the name of your client?"

"Certainly, you may ask. Every man has a right to ask what he pleases, in a civil way."

"But you'll not answer? Deep! Oh, I understand! Very good. But I am deep, too, sir. You know Mr. Varney, I suppose?"

The gentleman looked surprised. His bushy brows met over his steady, sagacious eyes; but, after a moment's pause, the expression of his face cleared up.

"It is as I thought," he said, half to himself. "Who else could have had an interest in similar inquiries?—Sir," he added, with a quick and decided tone, "you are, doubtless, employed by Mr. Varney, on behalf of Madame Dalibard, and in search of evidence connected with the loss of an unhappy infant. I am on the same quest, and for the same end. The interests of your client are mine. Two heads are better than one; let us unite our ingenuity and endeavours."

"And share the *pec*, I suppose?" said Grabman drily, buttoning up his pockets.

"Whatever fee you may expect you will have, anyhow, whether I assist you or not. I expect no fee—for mine is a personal interest, which I serve gratuitously; but I can under-

take to promise you, on my own part, more than the ordinary professional reward for your co-operation."

"Well, sir," said Grabman, mollified, "you speak very much like a gentleman. My feelings were hurt at first, I own. I am hasty, but I can listen to reason. Will you walk back with me to the house you have just left? and suppose we then turn in and have a chop together, and compare notes."

"Willingly!" answered the tall stranger, and the two inquisitors amicably joined company. The result of their inquiries was not, however, very satisfactory. No one knew whither Mrs. Joplin had gone, though all agreed it was in company with a man of bad character and vagrant habits; all agreed, too, in the vague recollection of the child, and some remembered that it was dressed in clothes finer than would have been natural to an infant legally and filially appertaining to Mrs. Joplin. One old woman remembered, that on her reproaching Mrs. Joplin for some act of great cruelty to the poor babe, she replied that it was not her flesh and blood, and that if she had not expected more than she had got, she would never have undertaken the charge. On comparing the information gleaned at the previous places of their research, they found an entire agreement as to the character personally borne by Mrs. Joplin. At the village to which their inquiry had been first directed, she was known as a respectable, precise young woman, one of a small congregation of rigid dissenters. She had married a member of the sect, and borne him a child, which died two weeks after birth. She was then seen nursing another infant—though how she came by it none knew. Shortly after this, her husband, a journeyman carpenter of good repute, died; but, to the surprise of the neighbours, Mrs. Joplin continued to live as comfortably as before, and seemed not to miss the wages of her husband: nay, she rather now, as if before kept back by the prudence of the deceased, launched into a less thrifty mode of life, and a gaiety of dress at variance both with the mourning her recent loss should have imposed, and the austere tenets of her sect. This indecorum excited angry curiosity, and drew down stern remonstrance. Mrs. Joplin, in apparent disgust at this intermeddling with her affairs, withdrew from the village to a small

town, about twenty miles distant, and there set up a shop. But her moral lapse became now confirmed; her life was notoriously abandoned, and her house the resort of all the reprobates of the place. Whether her means began to be exhausted, or the scandal she provoked attracted the notice of the magistrates, and imposed a check on her course, was not very certain, but she sold off her goods suddenly, and was next tracked to the village in which Mr. Grabman met his new coadjutor; and there, though her conduct was less flagrant, and her expenses less reckless, she made but a very unfavourable impression, which was confirmed by her flight with an itinerant hawker of the lowest possible character. Seated over their port wine, the two gentlemen compared their experiences, and consulted on the best mode of remending the broken thread of their research; when Mr. Grabman said, coolly, "But, after all, I think it most likely that we are not on the right scent. This bantling may not be the one we search for."

"Be not misled by that doubt. To arrive at the evidence we desire, we must still track this wretched woman."

"You are certain of that?"

"Certain."

"Hem! Did you ever hear of a Mr. Walter Ardworth?"

"Yes, what of him?"

"Why, he can best tell us where to look for the child."

"I am sure he would counsel as I do."

"You know him, then?"

"I do."

"What!—he lives still?"

"I hope so."

"Can you bring me across him?"

"If necessary."

"And that young man, who goes by his name, brought up by Mr. Fielden?——"

"Well, sir?"

"Is he not the son of Mr. Braddell?"

The stranger was silent, and, shading his face with his hand, seemed buried in thought. He then rose, took up his candle, and said quietly—

"Sir, I wish you good evening. I have letters to write in my own room. I will consider by to-morrow, if you stay till then, whether we can really aid each other farther, or whether we should pursue our researches separately." With these words he closed the door; and Mr. Grabman remained baffled and bewildered.

However, he too had a letter to write; so, calling for pen, ink, and paper, and a pint of brandy, he indited his complaints and his news to Varney:

"Jason" (he began), "are you playing me false? Have you set another man on the track with a view to bilk me of my promised fee? Explain, or I throw up the business."

Herewith, Mr. Grabman gave a minute description of the stranger, and related pretty accurately what had passed between that gentleman and himself. He then added the progress of his own inquiries, and renewed, as peremptorily as he dared, his demand for candour and plain dealing. Now, it so happened, that in stumbling up stairs to bed, Mr. Grabman passed the room in which his mysterious fellow-seeker was lodged, and as is the usage in hotels, a pair of boots stood outside the door, to be cleaned betimes in the morning. Though somewhat drunk, Grabman still preserved the rays of his habitual astuteness. A clever and a natural idea shot across his brain, illuminating the fumes of the brandy; he stooped, and while one hand on the wall steadied his footing, with the other he fished up a boot, and peering within, saw legibly written—"John Ardworth, Esq., Gray's Inn." At that sight, he felt what a philosopher feels at the sudden elucidation of a troublesome problem. Down stairs again tottered Grabman, re-opened his letter, and wrote—"P.S.—I have wronged you, Jason, by my suspicions; never mind—*Jubilate!* This interloper, who made me so jealous—who, think you, it is? Why, young Ardworth himself—that is, the lad who goes by such name. Now, is it not clear?—of course no one else has such interest in learning his birth as the lost child himself—here he is! If old Ardworth lives (as he says), old Ardworth has set him to work on his own business. But then, that Fielden—rather a puzzler that! Yet, no;—now I understand—old Ardworth gave the

boy to Mrs. Joplin, and took it away from her again when he went to the parson's. Now, certainly, it may be quite necessary to prove—first, that the boy he took from Mr. Braddell's he gave to Mrs. Joplin ; secondly, that the boy he left with Mr. Fielden was the same that he took again from that woman—therefore, the necessity of finding out Mother Joplin, an essential witness : Q. E. D., Master Jason !"

It was not till the sun had been some hours risen, that Mr. Grabman imitated that luminary's example. When he did so, he found, somewhat to his chagrin, that John Ardworth had long been gone. In fact, whatever the motive that had led the latter on the search, he had succeeded in gleaning from Grabman all that that person could communicate, and their interview had inspired him with such disgust of the attorney, and so small an opinion of the value of his co-operation (in which last belief, perhaps, he was mistaken), that he had resolved to continue his inquiries alone, and had already, in his early morning's walk through the village, ascertained that the man with whom Mrs. Joplin had quitted the place had some time after been sentenced to six months' imprisonment in the county gaol. Possibly, the prison authorities might know something to lead to his discovery ; and through him the news of his paramour might be gained.

CHAPTER XX.

MORE OF MRS. JOPLIN.

ONE day at the hour of noon, the court boasting the tall residence of Mr. Grabman was startled from the quiet usually reigning there at broad daylight, by the appearance of two men, evidently no inhabitants of the place. The squalid, ill-favoured denizens, lounging before the doors, stared hard ; and, at the fuller view of one of the men, most of them retreated hastily within. Then, in those houses, you might have heard a murmur of consternation and alarm. The ferret was in the

burrow—a Bow-street officer in the court! The two men paused, looked round, and, stopping before the dingy tower-like house, selected the bell which appealed to the inmates of the ground-floor, to the left. At that summons Bill the cracksman imprudently presented a full view of his countenance through his barred window; he drew it back with astonishing celerity; but not in time to escape the eye of the Bow Street runner.

"Open the door, Bill—there's nothing to fear—I have no summons against you, 'pon honour. You know I never deceive. Why should I? Open the door, I say!"

No answer.

The officer tapped with his cane at the foul window.

"Bill, there's a gentleman who comes to you for information, and he will pay for it handsomely."

Bill again appeared at the casement, and peeped forth very cautiously through the bars.

"Bless my vitals, Mr. R——! and it is you, is it? What were you saying about paying handsomely?"

"That your evidence is wanted—not against a pal, man. It will hurt no one, and put at least five guineas in your pocket."

"Ten guineas!" said the Bow-street officer's companion.

"You be's a man of onour, Mr. R——!" said Bill, emphatically; "and I scorns to doubt you, so here goes."

With that he withdrew from the window, and in another minute or so the door was opened, and Bill, with a superb bow, asked his visitors into his room.

In the interval, leisure had been given to the cracksman to remove all trace of the wonted educational employment of his hopeful children. The urchins were seated on the floor, playing at push-pin; and the Bow Street officer benignly patted a pair of curly heads as he passed them, drew a chair to the table, and wiping his forehead, sat down, quite at home. Bill then deliberately seated himself, and unbuttoning his waistcoat, permitted the butt-ends of a brace of pistols to be seen by his guests. Mr. R.'s companion seemed very unmoved by this significant action. He bent one inquiring steady look on the cracksman, which, as Bill afterwards said, went through

him "like a gimlet through a penny," and, taking out a purse, through the network of which the sovereigns gleamed pleasantly, placed it on the table, and said :

"This purse is yours, if you will tell me what has become of a woman named Joplin, with whom you left the village of ——, in Lancashire, in the year 18—."

"And," put in Mr. R——, "the gentleman wants to know, with no view of harming the woman. It will be to her own advantage to inform us where she is."

"'Pon honour, again?" said Bill.

"'Pon honour!"

"Well, then, I has a heart in my buzzom, and if so be I can do a good turn to the 'oman wot I has loved—and kep company with—why not?"

"Why not, indeed?" said Mr. R——. "And as we want to learn, not only what has become of Mrs. Joplin, but what she did with the child she carried off from ——, begin at the beginning, and tell us all you know."

Bill mused.

"How much is there in the pus?"

"Eighteen sovereigns."

"Make it twenty — you nod — twenty then?—a bargain! Now I'll go on right ahead. You see as how, some months arter we—that is, Peggy Joplin and self—left ——, I was put in quod in Lancaster gaol—so I lost sight of the blowen. When I got out, and came to Lunnun—it was a matter of seven year, afore, all of a sudding, I came bang up agin her—at the corner of Common Garden. 'Why, Bill!' says she. 'Why, Peggy!' says I—and we bussed each other like winky. 'Shall us come together agin?' says she. 'Why, no,' says I —'I has a wife wots a good un—and gets her bread by setting up as a widder with seven small childern! By the by, Peg what's a come of your brat?' for as you says, sir, Peg had a child put out to her to nurse. Lor! how she cuffed it! 'The brat!' says she, laughing like mad—'Oh, I got rid o' that when you were in jail, Bill.' 'As how?' says I. 'Why, there was a woman begging agin St. Poll's churchyard—so I purtended to see a frind at a distance—"'Old the babby a

moment," says I, puffing and panting—"while I ketches my friend yonder." So she 'olds the brat, and I never sees it agin;—and there's an ind of the bother!' 'But won't they ever ax for the child—them as giv' it you?' 'Oh, no,' says Peg, 'they left it too long for that, and all the tin was a-gone: and one mouth is hard enough to feed in these days!—let by other folks' bantlings.' 'Well,' says I, 'where do you hang out? I'll pop in, in a friendly way.' So she tells me—som'are in Lambeth (I forgets hexactly)—and many's the good piece of work we ha' done togither."

"And where is she now?" asked Mr. R——'s companion.

"I doesn't know purcisely, but I can com' at her: you see, when my poor wife died, four year com' Chris'mas, and left me with as fine a famuly, tho' I says it, as h-old King Georgy himself walked afore, with his gold-'eaded cane, on the terris at Vindsor—all heights and all h-ages, to the babby in arms (for the little 'un there warn't above a year old, and had been a-brought up upon spoon-meat, with a dash o' blue-ruin to make him slim and ginteel); as for the bigger uns wot you don't see, they be doin' well in forin parts, Mr. R——!"

Mr. R. smiled significantly.

Bill resumed. "Where was I? Oh, when my wife died, I wanted sum 'un to take care of the childern, so I takes Peg into the 'ous. But Lor! how she larrupped 'em—she has a cruel heart—hasn't she, Bob? Bob is a 'cute child, Mr. R——. Just as I was a-thinking of turning her out neck an' crop, a gemman what lodges aloft, wot be a laryer, and wot had just saved my nick, Mr. R——, by proving a h-alibi, said, 'That's a tidy body, your Peg!' (for you see he was often a-wisiting here, an' h-indeed, sin' then, he has taken our third floor, No. 9) 'I've been a-speakin' to her, and I find she has been a nuss to the sick. I has a frind wots a h-uncle that's ill, can you spare her, Bill, to attind him?' 'That I can,' says I, 'anything to obleedge.' So Peg packs off—bag and baggidge."

"And what was the sick gintleman's name?" asked Mr. R's. companion.

"It was one Mr. Warney—a painter, wot lived at Clap'am. Since thin I've lost sight of Peg: for we had 'igh words

about the childern,—and she was a spiteful 'oman. But you can larn where she be at Mr. Warney's if so be he's still above ground."

"And did this woman still go by the name of Joplin?"

Bill grinned: "She warn't such a spooney as that—that name was in your black books too much, Mr. R——, for a 'spectable nuss for sick bodies; no, she was then called Martha Skeggs, what was her own mother's name afore marriage. Anything more, gemmen?"

"I am satisfied," said the younger visitor, rising; "there is the purse, and Mr. R—— will bring you ten sovereigns in addition. Good day to you."

Bill, with superabundant bows and flourishes, showed his visitors out, and then, in high glee, he began to romp with his children; and the whole family circle was in a state of uproarious enjoyment when the door flew open, and in entered Grabman, his brief-bag in hand, dust-soiled, and unshaven.

"Aha, neighbour! your servant—your servant—just come back!—always so merry—for the life of me, I couldn't help looking in! Dear me, Bill! why, you're in luck!" and Mr. Grabman pointed to a pile of sovereigns which Bill had emptied from the purse to count over, and weigh on the tip of his forefinger.

"Yes," said Bill, sweeping the gold into his corduroy pocket, "and who do you think brought me these shiners? Why, who but old Peggy, the 'oman wot you put out at Clap'am."

"Well, never mind Peggy, now, Bill; I want to ask you what you have done with Margaret Joplin—whom, sly seducer that you are, you carried off from——"

"Why, man, Peggy be Joplin, and Joplin be Peggy!—and it's for that piece of noos that I got all them pretty new picters of his majesty Bill—my namesake, God bliss 'im!"

"D—n," exclaimed Grabman, aghast—"the young chap's spoiling my game again!" And seizing up his brief-bag, he darted out of the house in the hope to arrive, at least, at Clapham before his competitors.

CHAPTER XXI.

BECK'S DISCOVERY.

UNDER the cedar trees at Laughton sat that accursed and abhorrent being who sat there, young, impassioned, hopeful, as Lucretia Clavering—under the old cedar trees, which, save that their vast branches cast an imperceptibly broader shade over the mossy sward, the irrevocable winters had left the same. Where, through the nether boughs the autumn sunbeams came aslant, the windows, enriched by many a haughty scutcheon, shone brightly against the western rays. From the flower-beds in the quaint garden near at hand, the fresh yet tranquil air wafted faint perfumes from the lingering heliotrope and fading rose. The peacock perched dozily on the heavy balustrade ; the blithe robin hopped busily along the suntrack on the lawn ; in the distance the tinkling bells of the flock, the plaining low of some wandering heifer, while, breaking the silence, seemed still to blend with the repose. All images around lent themselves to complete that picture of stately calm, which is the character of those old mansion-houses, which owner after owner has loved, and heeded,—leaving to them the graces of antiquity, guarding them from the desolation of decay.

Alone sat Lucretia, under the cedar trees, and her heart made dismal contrast to the noble tranquillity that breathed around. From whatever softening or repentant emotions which the scene of her youth might first have awakened—from whatever of less unholy anguish which memory might have caused, when she first, once more, sat under those remembered boughs, and, as a voice from a former world, some faint whisper of youthful love sighed across the waste and ashes of her devastated soul,—from all such rekindled humanities in the past she had now, with gloomy power, wrenched herself away. Crime, such as hers, admits not long the *sentiment* that softens remorse of gentler error. If there wakes one moment from the past the warning and melancholy ghost, soon from that abyss rises the Fury with

the lifted scourge, and hunts on the frantic footsteps towards the future. In the future, the haggard intellect of crime must live; must involve itself mechanically in webs and meshes, and lose past and present in the welcome atmosphere of darkness.

Thus, while Lucretia sat, and her eyes rested upon the halls of her youth, her mind overleapt the gulf that yet yawned between her and the object on which she was bent. Already, in fancy, that home was hers again;—its present possessor swept away, the interloping race of Vernon, ending in one of those abrupt lines familiar to genealogists, which branch out busily from the main tree, as if all pith and sap were monopolised by them, continue for a single generation, and then shrink into a printer's bracket, with the formal laconism, "Died without issue." Back, then, in the pedigree would turn the eye of some curious descendant, and see the race continue in the posterity of Lucretia Clavering.

With all her ineffable vices, mere cupidity had not, as we have often seen, been a main characteristic of this fearful woman; and in her design to endow by the most determined guilt, her son with the heritage of her ancestors, she had hitherto looked but little to mere mercenary advantages for herself; but now, in the sight of that venerable and broad domain, a covetousness, absolute in itself, broke forth. Could she have gained it for her own use, rather than her son's, she would have felt a greater zest in her ruthless purpose. She looked upon the scene as a deposed monarch upon his usurped realm; it was her right. The early sense of possession in that inheritance returned to her.

Reluctantly would she even yield her claims to her child. Here, too, in this atmosphere she tasted once more what had long been lost to her—the luxury of that dignified respect which surrounds the well-born. Here, she ceased to be the suspected adventuress, the friendless outcast, the needy wrestler with hostile fortune, the skulking enemy of the law. She rose at once, and without effort, to her original state—the honoured daughter of an illustrious house. The homeliest welcome that greeted her from some aged but unforgotten villager, the salutation of homage, the bated breath of humble reverence—even trifles like these were dear to her, and made her the more resolute to

retain them. In her calm, relentless, onward vision, she saw herself enshrined in those halls, ruling in the delegated authority of her son, safe evermore from prying suspicion and degrading need, and miserable guilt for miserable objects. Here, but one great crime, and she resumed the majesty of her youth! While thus dwelling on the future, her eye did not even turn from those sunlit towers to the forms below, and more immediately inviting its survey. On the very spot where, at the opening of this tale, sat Sir Miles St. John, sharing his attention between his dogs and his guest,—sat now Helen Mainwaring; against the balustrade, where had lounged Charles Vernon, leant Percival St. John; and in the same place where he had stationed himself that eventful evening, to distort, in his malignant sketch, the features of his father, Gabriel Varney, with almost the same smile of irony upon his lips, was engaged in transferring to his canvas a more faithful likeness of the heir's intended bride. Helen's countenance, indeed, exhibited comparatively but little of the ravages which the pernicious aliment, administered so noiselessly, made upon the frame. The girl's eye, it is true, had sunk, and there was a languid heaviness in its look; but the contour of the cheek was so naturally rounded, and the features so delicately fine, that the fall of the muscles was less evident; and the bright warm hue of the complexion, and the pearly sparkle of the teeth, still gave a fallacious freshness to the aspect. But, as yet, the poisoners had forborne those ingredients which invade the springs of life, resorting only to such as undermine the health, and prepare the way to unsuspected graves. Out of the infernal variety of the materials at their command, they had selected a mixture which works by sustaining perpetual fever! which gives little pain, little suffering, beyond that of lassitude and thirst; which wastes like consumption, and yet puzzles the physician, by betraying few or none of its ordinary symptoms. But the disorder, as yet, was not incurable—its progress would gradually cease with the discontinuance of the venom.

Although October was far advanced, the day was as mild and warm as August. But Percival, who had been watching Helen's countenance, with the anxiety of love and fear, now proposed that the sitting should be adjourned. The sun was

declining, and it was certainly no longer safe for Helen to be exposed to the air without exercise. He proposed that they should walk through the garden, and Helen, rising cheerfully, placed her hand on his arm. But she had scarcely descended the steps of the terrace when she stopped short, and breathed hard and painfully. The spasm was soon over, and walking slowly on, they passed Lucretia with a brief word or two, and were soon out of sight amongst the cedars.

"Lean more on my arm, Helen," said Percival. "How strange it is, that the change of air has done so little for you, and our country doctor still less! I should feel miserable, indeed, if Simmons, whom my mother always considered very clever, did not assure me that there was no ground for alarm —that these symptoms were only nervous. Cheer up, Helen —sweet love, cheer up!"

Helen raised her face, and strove to smile, but the tears stood in her eyes: "It would be hard to die now, Percival!" she said, falteringly.

"To die—oh, Helen! No; we must not stay here longer— the air is certainly too keen for you. Perhaps your aunt will go to Italy—why not all go there, and seek my mother? And she will nurse you, Helen,—and—and——" He could not trust his voice farther.

Helen pressed his arm tenderly: "Forgive me, dear Percival —it is but at moments that I feel so despondent—now, again, it is past. Ah, I so long to see your mother! when will you hear from her? Are you not too sanguine?—do you really feel sure she will consent to so lowly a choice?"

"Never doubt her affection—her appreciation of you," answered Percival, gladly, and hoping that Helen's natural anxiety might be the latent cause of her dejected spirits: "often, when talking of the future, under these very cedars, my mother has said— 'You have no cause to marry for ambition—marry only for your happiness.' She never had a daughter—in return for all her love, I shall give her that blessing."

Thus talking, the lovers rambled on till the sun set, and then, returning to the house, they found that Varney and Madame Dalibard had preceded them. That evening Helen's

spirits rose to their natural buoyancy. And Percival's heart was once more set at ease by her silvery laugh.

When, at their usual early hour, the rest of the family retired to sleep, Percival remained in the drawing-room to write again, and at length, to Lady Mary and Captain Greville. While thus engaged, his valet entered, to say, that Beck, who had been out since the early morning, in search of a horse that had strayed from one of the pastures, had just returned with the animal, who had wandered nearly as far as Southampton.

"I am glad to hear it," said Percival, abstractedly, and continuing his letter.

The valet still lingered—Percival looked up in surprise.

"If you please, sir, you said you particularly wished to see Beck, when he came back."

"I—oh, true! Tell him to wait—I will speak to him by and by—you need not sit up for me—let Beck attend to the bell."

The valet withdrew. Percival continued his letter, and filled page after page, and sheet after sheet; and when at length the letters, not containing a tithe of what he wished to convey, were brought to a close, he fell into a reverie that lasted till the candles burnt low, and the clock from the turret tolled one. Starting up in surprise at the lapse of time, Percival then, for the first time, remembered Beck, and rung the bell.

The *ci-devant* sweeper, in his smart livery, appeared at the door.

"Beck, my poor fellow, I am ashamed to have kept you waiting so long; but I received a letter this morning which relates to you. Let me see, I left it in my study up stairs. Ah —you'll never find the way—follow me—I have some questions to put to you."

"Nothin' agin my carakter, I hopes, your onor," said Beck, timidly.

"Oh, no!"

"Noos of the mattris, then?" exclaimed Beck, joyfully.

"Nor that either," answered Percival, laughing, as he lighted the chamber candlestick, and, followed by Beck, ascended the grand staircase to a small room which, as it adjoined his sleeping

apartment, he had habitually used as his morning writing-room and study.

Percival had, indeed, received that day a letter which had occasioned him much surprise; it was from John Ardworth, and ran thus:—

"My dear Percival,—It seems that you have taken into your service a young man known only by the name of Beck. Is he now with you at Laughton? If so, pray retain him, and suffer him to be in readiness to come to me at a day's notice if wanted, though it is probable enough that I may rather come to you. At present, strange as it may seem to you, I am detained in London by business connected with that important personage. Will you ask him carelessly, as it were, in the meanwhile, the following questions:—

"First: How did he become possessed of a certain child's coral, which he left at the house of one Becky Carruthers, in Cole's-buildings?

"Secondly: Is he aware of any mark on his arm—if so, will he describe it?

"Thirdly: How long has he known the said Becky Carruthers?

"Fourthly: Does he believe her to be honest and truthful?

'Take a memorandum of his answers, and send it to me. I am pretty well aware of what they are likely to be; but I desire you to put the questions, that I may judge if there be any discrepancy between his statement and that of Mrs. Carruthers. I have much to tell you, and am eager to receive your kind congratulations upon an event that has given me more happiness than the fugitive success of my little book. Tenderest regards to Helen; and, hoping soon to see you, ever affectionately yours.

"P.S. Say not a word of the contents of this letter to Madame Dalibard, Helen, or to any one except Beck. Caution him to the same discretion. If you can't trust to his silence, send him to town."

When the post brought this letter, Beck was already gone on his errand, and after puzzling himself with vague conjectures

Percival's mind had been naturally too absorbed with his anxieties for Helen to recur much to the subject.

Now, refreshing his memory with the contents of the letter, he drew pen and ink before him, put the questions *seriatim*, noted down the answers as desired, and smiling at Beck's frightened curiosity to know who could possibly care about such matters, and feeling confident (from that very fright) of his discretion, dismissed the groom to his repose.

Beck had never been in that part of the house before; and when he got into the corridor he became bewildered, and knew not which turn to take—the right or the left. He had no candle with him; but the moon came clear through a high and wide skylight; the light, however, gave him no guide. While pausing, much perplexed, and not sure that he should even know again the door of the room he had just quitted, if venturing to apply to his young master for a clue through such a labyrinth, he was inexpressibly startled and appalled by a sudden apparition. A door at one end of the corridor opened noiselessly, and a figure, at first scarcely distinguishable, for it was robed from head to foot in a black shapeless garb, scarcely giving even the outline of the human form, stole forth. Beck rubbed his eyes, and crept mechanically close within the recess of one of the doors that communicated with the passage. The figure advanced a few steps towards him; and what words can describe his astonishment when he beheld thus erect, and in full possession of physical power and motion, the palsied cripple whose chair he had often seen wheeled into the garden, and whose unhappy state was the common topic of comment in the servants' hall! Yes, the moon from above shone full upon that face which never, once seen, could be forgotten. And it seemed more than mortally stern and pale, contrasted with the sable of the strange garb, and beheld by that mournful light. Had a ghost, indeed, risen from the dead, it could scarcely have appalled him more. Madame Dalibard did not see the involuntary spy; for the recess in which he had crept was on that side of the wall on which the moon's shadow was cast. With a quick step she turned into another room, opposite that which she had quitted, the

door of which stood ajar, and vanished noiselessly as she had appeared.

Taught suspicion by his earlier acquaintance with the "night-side" of human nature, Beck had good cause for it here—this detection of an imposture most familiar to his experience—that of a pretended cripple,—the hour of the night,—the evil expression on the face of the deceitful guest,—Madame Dalibard's familiar intimacy and near connection with Varney—Varney, the visitor to Grabman, who received no visitors but those who desire not to go to law, but to escape from its penalties—Varney, who had dared to brave the Resurrection Man in his den, and who seemed so fearlessly at home in abodes where nought but poverty could protect the honest,—Varney now, with that strange woman, an inmate of a house in which the master was so young, so inexperienced, so liable to be duped by his own generous nature—all these ideas vaguely combined inspired Beck with as vague a terror; surely something, he knew not what, was about to be perpetrated against his benefactor—some scheme of villany which it was his duty to detect. He breathed hard, formed his resolves, and stealing on tiptoe, followed the shadowy form of the poisoner through the half-opened doorway. The shutters of the room of which he thus crossed the threshold were not closed—the moon shone in bright and still. He kept his body behind the door, peeping in with straining fearful stare. He saw Madame Dalibard standing beside a bed, round which the curtains were closed—standing for a moment or so motionless, and as if in the act of listening, with one hand on a table beside the bed. He then saw her take from the folds of her dress something white and glittering, and pour from it what appeared to him but a drop or two, cautiously, slowly, into a phial on the table, from which she withdrew the stopper; that done, she left the phial where she had found it, again paused a moment, and turned towards the door. Beck retreated hastily to his former hiding-place, and gained it in time. Again the shadowy form passed him, and again the white face in the white moonlight froze his blood with its fell and horrible expression. He remained cowering

and shrinking against the wall for some time, striving to collect his wits, and considering what he should do. His first thought was to go at once and inform St. John of what he had witnessed. But the poor have a proverbial dread of deposing aught against a superior. Madame Dalibard would deny his tale,—the guest would be believed against the menial,—he should be but dismissed with ignominy. At that idea, he left his hiding-place, and crept along the corridor, in the hope of finding some passage at the end which might lead to the offices. But when he arrived at the other extremity, he was only met by great folding-doors, which evidently communicated with the state apartments. He must retrace his steps—he did so; and when he came to the door which Madame Dalibard had entered, and which still stood ajar, he had recovered some courage, and with courage, curiosity seized him. For what purpose could the strange woman seek that room at night thus feloniously?—what could she have poured, and with such stealthy caution, into the phial? Naturally and suddenly the idea of poison flashed across him. Tales of such crime (as, indeed, of all crime) had necessarily often thrilled the ear of the vagrant fellow-lodger with burglars and outlaws. But poison to whom? Could it be meant for his benefactor? Could St. John sleep in that room?—why not? The woman had sought the chamber before her young host had retired to rest, and mingled her potion with some medicinal draught. All fear vanished before the notion of danger to his employer. He stole at once through the doorway, and noiselessly approached the table on which yet lay the phial. His hand closed on it firmly. He resolved to carry it away, and consider next morning what next to do. At all events, it might contain some proof to back his tale, and justify his suspicions. When he came once more into the corridor, he made a quick rush onwards, and luckily arrived at the staircase. There the blood-red stains reflected on the stone floors from the blazoned casements daunted him little less than the sight at which his hair still bristled. He scarcely drew breath till he had got into his own little crib, in the wing set apart for the stable-men, when, at length, he

fell into broken and agitated sleep,—the visions of all that had successively disturbed him waking, united confusedly, as in one picture of gloom and terror. He thought that he was in his old loft in St. Giles's; that the Gravestealer was wrestling with Varney for his body, while he himself, lying powerless on his pallet, fancied he should be safe as long as he could retain, as a talisman, his child's coral, which he clasped to his heart. Suddenly, in that black shapeless garb in which he had beheld her Madame Dalibard bent over him with her stern colourless face, and wrenched from him his charm. Then, ceasing his struggle with his horrible antagonist, Varney laughed aloud, and the Gravestealer seized him in his deadly arms.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TAPESTRY CHAMBER.

WHEN Beck woke the next morning, and gradually recalled all that had so startled and appalled him the previous night—the grateful creature felt, less by the process of reason than by a brute instinct, that in the mysterious resuscitation and nocturnal wanderings of the pretended paralytic, some danger menaced his master—he became anxious to learn whether it was really St. John's room Madame Dalibard stealthily visited. A bright idea struck him—and in the course of the day, at an hour when the family were out of doors, he contrived to coax the good-natured valet, who had taken him under his special protection to show him over the house. He had heard the other servants say there was such a power of fine things, that a peep into the rooms was as good as a show, and the valet felt pride in being *cicerone* even to Beck. After having stared sufficiently at the banquet-hall, and the drawing-room, the armour, the busts, and the pictures, and listened, open-mouthed, to his guide's critical observations, Beck was led up the great stairs into the old family picture gallery, and into Sir Miles's ancient room at the end, which had been left undisturbed, with the bed still in the angle;

on returning thence, Beck found himself in the corridor which communicated with the principal bedrooms, in which he had lost himself the night before.

"And vot room be that vith the littul vite 'ead h-over the door?" asked Beck, pointing to the chamber from which Madame Dalibard had emerged.

"That white head, Master Beck, is Floorer the goddess; but a heathen like you knows nothing about goddesses. Floorer has a half-moon in her hair, you see, which shows that the idolatrous Turks worship her, for the Turkish flag is a half-moon, as I have seen at Constantinople! I have travelled, Beck."

"And vot room be it? Is it the master's?" persisted Beck.

"No, the pretty young lady, Miss Mainwaring, has it at present. There is nothing to see in it. But that one opposite;" and the valet advanced to the door through which Madame Dalibard had disappeared—"*that* is curious; and as Madame is out we may just take a peep." He opened the door, gently, and Beck looked in. "This, which is called the turret-chamber, was Madame's when she was a girl, I have heard old Bessy say; so master pops her there now. For my part, I'd rather sleep in your little crib, than have those great gruff-looking figures staring at me by the firelight, and shaking their heads with every wind on a winter's night." And the valet took a pinch of snuff, as he drew Beck's attention to the faded tapestry on the walls. As they spoke, the draught between the door and the window caused the gloomy arras to wave with a life-like motion; and to those more superstitious than romantic, the chamber had certainly no inviting aspect

"I never sees these old tapestry rooms," said the valet, "without thinking of the story of the lady who, coming from a ball and taking off her jewels, happened to look up, and saw an eye in one of the figures which she felt sure was no peeper in worsted."

"Vot vos it, then?" asked Beck, timidly lifting up the hangings, and noticing that there was a considerable space between them and the wall, which was filled up in part by closets and wardrobes set into the walls, with intervals more than deep enough for the hiding-place of a man.

"Why," answered the valet, "it was a thief. He had come

for the jewels; but the lady had the presence of mind to say aloud, as if to herself, that she had forgotten something, slipped out of the room, locked the door, called up the servants, and the thief—who was no less a person than the under-butler—was nabbed."

"And the French 'oman sleeps 'ere?" said Beck, musingly.

"French 'oman! Master Beck, nothing's so vulgar as these nicknames, in a first-rate sitivation. It is all very well when one lives with skinflints, but with such a master as our'n respect's the go. Besides, Madame is not a French 'oman; she is one of the family—and as old a family it is too, as e'er a lord's in the three kingdoms. But come, your curiosity is satisfied now, and you must trot back to your horses."

As Beck returned to the stables, his mind yet more misgave him as to the criminal designs of his master's visitor. It was from Helen's room that the false cripple had walked, and the ill health of the poor young lady was a general subject of compassionate comment. But Madame Dalibard was Helen's relation—from what motive could she harbour an evil thought against her own niece. But still, if those drops were poured into the healing draught for good—why so secretly? Once more he revolved the idea of speaking to St. John—an accident dissuaded him from this intention; the only proof to back his tale was the mysterious phial he had carried away; but unluckily, forgetting that it was in his pocket—at a time when he flung off his coat to groom one of the horses, the bottle struck against the corn-bin and broke—all the contents were spilt. This incident made him suspend his intention, and wait till he could obtain some fresh evidence of evil intentions. The day passed without any other noticeable occurrence. The doctor called, found Helen somewhat better, and ascribed it to his medicines, especially to the effect of his tonic draught the first thing in the morning. Helen smiled—"Nay, doctor," said she, "this morning, at least, it was forgotten. I did not find it by my bedside. Don't tell my aunt, she would be so angry." The doctor looked rather discomposed.

"Well," said he, soon recovering his good humour, "since you are certainly better to-day without the draught, discontinue it

also to-morrow. I will make an alteration for the day after." So that night Madame Dalibard visited in vain her niece's chamber—Helen had a reprieve.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SHADES ON THE DIAL.

THE following morning was indeed eventful to the family at Laughton; and, as if conscious of what it brought forth, it rose dreary and sunless; one heavy mist covered all the landscape, and a raw drizzling rain fell pattering through the yellow leaves.

Madame Dalibard, pleading her infirmities, rarely left her room before noon, and Varney professed himself very irregular in his hours of rising; the breakfast, therefore, afforded no social assembly to the family, but each took that meal in the solitude of his or her own chamber. Percival, in whom all habits partook of the healthfulness and simplicity of his character, rose habitually early; and that day, in spite of the weather, walked forth betimes to meet the person charged with the letters from the post. He had done so for the last three or four days, impatient to hear from his mother, and calculating that it was full time to receive the expected answer to his confession and his prayer. He met the messenger at the bottom of the park, not far from Guy's Oak. This day he was not disappointed. The letter-bag contained three letters for himself, two with the foreign postmark—the third in Ardworth's hand. It contained also a letter for Madame Dalibard, and two for Varney.

Leaving the messenger to take these last to the hall, Percival, with his own prizes, plunged into the hollow of the glen before him, and, seating himself at the foot of Guy's Oak, through the vast branches of which the rain scarcely came, and only in single, mournful drops, he opened first the letter in his mother's hand, and read as follows:—

"MY DEAR, DEAR SON,—How can I express to you the alarm your letter has given to me! So these, then, are the new relations you have discovered! I fondly imagined that you were alluding to some of my own family, and conjecturing who, amongst my many cousins could have so captivated your attention. These the new relations!—Lucretia Dalibard—Helen Mainwaring! Percival, do you not know——no, you cannot know—that Helen Mainwaring is the daughter of a disgraced man—of one who (more than suspected of fraud in the bank in which he was a partner) left his country, condemned even by his own father. If you doubt this you have but to inquire at ——, not ten miles from Laughton, where the elder Mainwaring resided. Ask there what became of William Mainwaring. And Lucretia,—you do not know that the dying prayer of her uncle, Sir Miles St. John, was that she might never enter the house he bequeathed to your father. Not till after my poor Charles's death did I know the exact cause for Sir Miles's displeasure, though confident it was just; but then amongst his papers I found the ungrateful letter which betrayed thoughts so dark, and passions so unwomanly, that I blushed for my sex to read it. Could it be possible that that poor old man's prayers were unheeded—that that treacherous step could ever cross your threshold—that that cruel eye, which read with such barbarous joy the ravages of death on a benefactor's face, could rest on the hearth, by which your frank, truthful countenance has so often smiled away my tears, I should feel, indeed, as if a thunder-cloud hung over the roof. No! if you marry the niece, the aunt must be banished from your house. Good Heavens! and it is the daughter of William Mainwaring, the niece and ward of Lucretia Dalibard, to whom you have given your faithful affection—whom you single from the world as your wife! Oh! my son—my beloved—my sole surviving child—do not think that I blame you, that my heart does not bleed while I write thus; but I implore you on my knees to pause at least—to suspend this intercourse, till I myself can reach England. And what then? Why, then, Percival, I promise, on my part, that I will see your Helen with unprejudiced eyes—that I will put away from me, as far as possible, all visions of disappointed

pride—the remembrance of faults not her own: and if she be as you say and think, I will take her to my heart and call her 'Daughter.' Are you satisfied? If so, come to me—come at once, and take comfort from your mother's lip. How I long to be with you while you read this—how I tremble at the pain I so rudely give you! But my poor sister still chains me here, I dare not leave her, lest I should lose her last sigh. Come then, come, we will console each other.

"Your fond (how fond!) and sorrowing mother,

"MARY ST. JOHN.

"*October 3rd*, 1831.

"*Sorrento.*

"P.S.—You see by this address that we have left Pisa for this place, recommended by our physician; hence an unhappy delay of some days in my reply. Ah, Percival, how sleepless will be my pillow till I hear from you!"

Long, very long, was it before St. John, mute and overwhelmed with the sudden shock of his anguish, opened his other letters—the first was from Captain Greville:—

"What trap have you fallen into, foolish boy? That you would get into some silly scrape or another was natural enough. But a scrape for life, Sir—that is serious! But, God bless you for your candour, my Percival—you have written to us in time—you are old-fashioned enough to think that a mother's consent is necessary to a young man's union. And you have left it in our power to save you yet; it is not every boyish fancy that proves to be true love. But enough of this preaching; I shall do better than write scolding letters, I shall come and scold you in person. My servant is at this very moment packing my portmanteau, the *laquais-de-place* is gone to Naples for my passport. Almost as soon as you receive this I shall be with you; and if I am a day or two later than the mail, be patient; do not commit yourself further. Break your heart if you please, but don't implicate your honour. I shall come at once to Curzon Street. Adieu!

"H. GREVILLE."

Ardworth's letter was shorter than the others: fortunately so, for otherwise it had been unread:—

"If I do not come to you myself the day after you receive this, dear Percival, which, indeed, is most probable, I shall send you my proxy, in one whom, for my sake, I know that you will kindly welcome. He will undertake my task, and clear up all the mysteries with which, I trust, my correspondence has thoroughly bewildered your lively imagination.—Yours, ever,

"JOHN ARDWORTH.

"*Gray's Inn.*"

Little, indeed, did Percival's imagination busy itself with the mysteries of Ardworth's correspondence. His mind scarcely took in the sense of the words over which his eye mechanically wandered.

And the letter which narrated the visit of Madame Dalibard to the house thus solemnly interdicted to her step was on its way to his mother; nay, by this time would almost have reached her! Greville was on the road; nay, as his tutor's letter had been forwarded from London—might, perhaps, be in Curzon Street that day. How desirable to see him before he could reach Laughton, to prepare him for Madame Dalibard's visit; for Helen's illness; explain the position in which he was involved, and conciliate the old soldier's rough, kind heart to his love and his distress!

He did not dread the meeting with Greville—he yearned for it. He needed an adviser, a confidant, a friend. To dismiss abruptly his guests from his house—impossible! to abandon Helen because of her father's crime, or her aunt's fault (whatever that last might be—and no clear detail of it was given), *that* never entered his thoughts! Pure and unsullied, the starry face of Helen shone the holier for the cloud around it. An inexpressible and chivalrous compassion mingled with his love and confirmed his faith. She, poor child, to suffer for the deeds of others! No. What availed his power as man, and dignity as gentleman, if they could not wrap in their own shelter the one by whom such shelter was now doubly needed? Thus,

amidst all his emotions—firm and resolved, at least on one point—and beginning already to recover the hope of his sanguine nature, from his reliance on his mother's love, on the promises that softened her disclosures and warnings, and on his conviction that Helen had only to be seen for every scruple to give way, Percival wandered back towards the house, and, coming abruptly on the terrace, he encountered Varney, who was leaning motionless against the balustrades, with an open letter in his hand. Varney was deadly pale, and there was the trace of some recent and gloomy agitation in the relaxed muscles of his cheeks, usually so firmly rounded. But Percival did not heed his appearance as he took him gravely by the arm, and leading him into the garden, said, after a painful pause—

"Varney, I am about to ask you two questions, which your close connection with Madame Dalibard may enable you to answer; but in which, from obvious motives, I must demand the strictest confidence. You will not hint to her or to Helen what I am about to say?"

Varney stared uneasily on Percival's serious countenance, and gave the promise required.

"First, then, for what offence was Madame Dalibard expelled her uncle's house—this house of Laughton?

"Secondly, what is the crime with which Mr. Mainwaring, Helen's father, is charged?"

"With regard to the first," said Varney, recovering his composure, "I thought I had already told you that Sir Miles was a proud man, and that, in consequence of discovering a girlish flirtation between his niece Lucretia (now Madame Dalibard) and Mainwaring, who afterwards jilted her for Helen's mother, he altered his will—'expelled her his house,' is too harsh a phrase. This is all I know. With regard to the second question, no crime was ever brought home to William Mainwaring. He was suspected of dealing improperly with the funds of the bank, and he repaid the alleged deficit by the sacrifice of all he possessed."

"This is the truth?" exclaimed Percival joyfully.

"The plain truth, I believe; but why these questions at this

moment? Ah, you too, I see, have had letters—I understand! Lady Mary gives these reasons for withholding her consent."

"Her consent is not withheld," answered Percival; "but, shall I own it?—remember, I have your promise not to wound and offend Madame Dalibard by the disclosure: my mother does refer to the subjects I have alluded to, and Captain Greville, my old friend and tutor, is on his way to England—perhaps to-morrow he may arrive at Laughton.

"Ha!" said Varney, startled—"to-morrow!—and what sort of a man is this Captain Greville?"

"The best man possible for such a case as mine—kind-hearted, yet cool, sagacious, the finest observer, the quickest judge of character—nothing escapes him. Oh, one interview will suffice to show him all Helen's innocent and matchless excellence!"

"To-morrow! this man comes to-morrow!"

"All that I fear is—for he is rather rough and blunt in his manner,—all that I fear is, his first surprise—and, dare I say, displeasure, at seeing this poor Madame Dalibard, whose faults, I fear, were graver than you suppose, at the house from which her uncle—to whom, indeed, I owe this inheritance——"

"I see—I see!" interrupted Varney, quickly. "And Madame Dalibard is the most susceptible of women—so well-born, and so poor, so gifted, and so helpless—it is natural. Can you not write, and put off this Captain Greville for a few days?—until, indeed, I can find some excuse for terminating our visit."

"But my letter may be hardly in time to reach him; he may be in town to-day."

"Go then to town at once; you can be back late at night, or at least to-morrow. Anything better than wounding the pride of a woman, on whom, after all, you must depend for free and open intercourse with Helen."

"That is exactly what I thought of; but what excuse——"

"Excuse!—a thousand! Every man coming of age into such a property has business with his lawyers; or why not say simply that you want to meet a friend of yours, who has just left your mother in Italy?—in short, any excuse suffices, and none can be offensive."

"I will order my carriage instantly."

"Right!" exclaimed Varney; and his eye followed the receding form of Percival with a mixture of fierce exultation and anxious fear. Then turning towards the window of the turret-chamber, in which Madame Dalibard reposed, and seeing it still closed, he muttered an impatient oath; but even while he did so, the shutters were slowly opened, and a footman, stepping from the porch, approached Varney with a message, that Madame Dalibard would see him in five minutes, if he would then have the goodness to ascend to her room.

Before that time was well expired, Varney was in the chamber. Madame Dalibard was up and in her chair: and the unwonted joy which her countenance evinced was in strong contrast with the sombre shade upon her son-in-law's brow, and the nervous quiver of his lip.

"Gabriel," she said, as he drew near to her, "my son is found!"

"I know it," he answered petulantly.

"You!—from whom?"

"From Grabman."

"And I from a still better authority—from Walter Ardworth himself! He lives; he will restore my child!" She extended a letter while she spoke. He, in return, gave her, not that still crumpled in his hand, but one which he drew from his breast. These letters severally occupied both, begun and finished almost in the same moment.

That from Grabman ran thus:

"DEAR JASON—Toss up your hat, and cry hip, hip! At last, from person to person, I have tracked the lost Vincent Braddell. He lives still! We can maintain his identity in any court of law. Scarce in time for the post, I have not a moment for further particulars. I shall employ the next two days in reducing all the evidence to a regular digest, which I will despatch to you. Meanwhile, prepare, as soon as may be, to put me in possession of my fee,—5000*l.*, and my expedition merits something more.—Yours,

"NICHOLAS GRABMAN."

The letter from Ardworth was no less positive:—

"MADAM,—In obedience to the commands of a dying friend, I took charge of his infant, and concealed its existence from his mother—yourself. On returning to England, I need not say that I was not unmindful of my trust. Your son lives: and, after mature reflection, I have resolved to restore him to your arms. In this I have been decided by what I have heard from one whom I can trust, of your altered habits, your decorous life, your melancholy infirmities, and the generous protection you have given to the orphan of my poor cousin Susan, my old friend Mainwaring. Alfred Braddell himself, if it be permitted to him to look down and read my motives, will pardon me, I venture to feel assured, this departure from his injunctions. Whatever the faults which displeased him, they have been amply chastised. And your son, grown to man, can no longer be endangered by example, in tending the couch, or soothing the repentance, of his mother.

"These words are severe; but you will pardon them in him who gives you back your child. I shall venture to wait on you in person, with such proofs as may satisfy you as to the identity of your son. I count on arriving at Laughton to-morrow. Meanwhile, I simply sign myself by a name, in which you will recognise the kinsman to one branch of your family, and the friend of your dead husband.

"J. WALTER ARDWORTH.

"CRAVEN HOTEL, *October*, 1831."

"Well; and are you not rejoiced?" said Lucretia, gazing surprised on Varney's sullen and unsympathising face.

"No! because time presses: because, even while discovering your son, you may fail in securing his heritage; because, in the midst of your triumph, I see Newgate opening to myself! Look you, I too have had my news—less pleasing than yours. This Stubmore (curse him!) writes me word, that he shall certainly be in town next month at farthest, and that he meditates, immediately on his arrival, transferring the legacy from the Bank of England to an excellent mortgage of which he has

heard. Were it not for this scheme of ours, nothing would be left for me but flight and exile."

"A month!—that is a long time. Do you think, now that my son is found, and that son like John Ardworth (for there can be no doubt that my surmise was right), with genius to make station the pedestal to the power I dreamed of in my youth, but which my sex forbade me to attain—do you think I will keep him a month from his inheritance? Before the month is out, you shall replace what you have taken and buy your trustee's silence, if need be—either from the sums you have insured, or from the rents of Laughton."

"Lucretia!" said Varney, whose fresh colours had grown livid —"what is to be done must be done at once! Percival St. John has heard from his mother. Attend!" And Varney rapidly related the questions St. John had put to him, the dreaded arrival of Captain Greville, the danger of so keen an observer —the necessity, at all events, of abridging their visit—the urgency of hastening the catastrophe to its close.

Lucretia listened in ominous and steadfast silence.

"But," she said, at last, "you have persuaded St. John to give this man the meeting in London—to put off his visit for the time! St John will return to us to-morrow. Well; and if he finds his Helen is no more! Two nights ago, I, for the first time, mingled in the morning draught that which has no antidote and no cure. This night two drops more, and St. John will return to find that Death is in the house before him. And then for himself—the sole remaining barrier between my son and this inheritance, for himself—why, grief sometimes kills suddenly; and there be drugs whose effect simulates the death-stroke of grief."

"Yet, yet, this rapidity, if necessary, is perilous. Nothing in Helen's state forbodes *sudden* death by natural means. The strangeness of two deaths—both so young—Greville in England, if not here—hastening down to examine, to inquire, with such prepossessions against you:—there must be an inquest!"

"Well, and what can be discovered? It was I who shrank before—it is I who now urge despatch. I feel as in my proper home in these halls. I would not leave them again but to my

grave! I stand on the hearth of my youth. I fight for my rights and my son's. Perish those who oppose me!"

A fell energy and power were in the aspect of the murderess as she thus spoke; and while her determination awed the inferior villany of Varney, it served somewhat to mitigate his fears.

As in more detail they began to arrange their execrable plans, Percival, while the horses were being harnessed to take him to the nearest post-town, sought Helen, and found her in the little chamber which he had described and appropriated as her own, when his fond fancy had sketched the fair outline of the future.

This room had been originally fitted up for the private devotions of the Roman Catholic wife of an ancestor, in the reign of Charles II.; and in a recess, half veiled by a curtain, there still stood that holy symbol, which, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic, no one sincerely penetrated with the solemn pathos of sacred history can behold unmoved—the Cross of the Divine Agony. Before this holy symbol, Helen stood in earnest reverence. She did not kneel (for the forms of the religion in which she had been reared were opposed to that posture of worship before the graven image), but you could see in that countenance, eloquent at once with the enthusiasm and the meekness of piety, that the soul was filled with the memories and the hopes, which, age after age, have consoled the sufferer, and inspired the martyr. The soul knelt to the idea, if the knee bowed not to the image, embracing the tender grandeur of the sacrifice, and the vast inheritance opened to faith in the redemption.

The young man held his breath while he gazed. He was moved, and he was awed. Slowly Helen turned towards him, and, smiling sweetly, held out to him her hand. They seated themselves in silence in the depth of the overhanging casement; and the mournful character of the scene without, where, dimly through the misty rains, gloomed the dark foliage of the cedars, made them insensibly draw closer to each other, in the instinct of love when the world frowns around it. Percival wanted the courage to say that he had come to take farewell, though but for a day, and Helen spoke first.

"I cannot guess why it is, Percival, but I am startled at the change I feel in myself—no, not in health, dear Percival, I mean in mind—during the last few months,—since, indeed, we have known each other. I remember so well the morning in which my aunt's letter arrived at the dear vicarage. We were returning from the village fair, and my good guardian was smiling at my notions of the world. I was then so giddy, and light, and thoughtless,—everything presented itself to me in such gay colours,—I scarcely believed in sorrow. And now I feel as if I were awakened to a truer sense of nature—of the ends of our being here; I seem to know that life is a grave and solemn thing. Yet I am not less happy, Percival. No, I think rather that I knew not true happiness till I knew you. I have read somewhere that the slave is gay in his holiday from toil; if you free him, if you educate him, the gaiety vanishes, and he cares no more for the dance under the palm-tree. But is he less happy? So it is with me!"

"My sweet Helen, I would rather have one gay smile of old—the arch, careless laugh which came so naturally from those rosy lips, than hear you talk of happiness with that quiver in your voice—those tears in your eyes."

"Yet gaiety," said Helen, thoughtfully, and in the strain of her pure, truthful poetry of soul, "is only the light impression of the present moment—the play of the mere spirits; and happiness seems a forethought of the future, spreading on, far and broad, over all time and space."

"And you live, then, in the future, at last?—you have no misgivings now, my Helen? Well, that comforts me! Say it, Helen—say the future will be ours!"

"It will—it will—for ever and for ever," said Helen, earnestly; and her eyes involuntarily rested on the Cross.

In his younger spirit, and less imaginative nature, Percival did not comprehend the depth of sadness implied in Helen's answer; taking it literally, he felt as if a load were lifted from his heart; and kissing with rapture the hand he held, he exclaimed—"Yes, this shall soon—oh, soon be mine! I fear nothing while you hope. You cannot guess how those words have cheered me; for I am leaving you, though but for a few

hours, and I shall repeat those words—for they will ring in my ear, in my heart, till we meet again."

"Leaving me!" said Helen, turning pale, and her clasp on his hand tightening. Poor child! she felt mysteriously a sentiment of protection in his presence.

"But at most for a day. My old tutor, of whom we have so often conversed, is on his way to England – perhaps even now in London. He has some wrong impressions against your aunt —his manner is blunt and rough. It is necessary that I should see him before he comes hither—you know how susceptible is your aunt's pride—just to prepare him for meeting her—you understand?"

"What impressions against my aunt? Does he even know her?" asked Helen; and if such a sentiment as suspicion could cross that candid innocence of mind,—that sentiment towards this stern relation whose arms had never embraced her,—whose lips had never spoken of the past,—whose history was as a sealed volume, disturbed and disquieted her.

"It is because he has never known her that he does her wrong. Some old story of her indiscretion as a girl—of her uncle's displeasure—what matters now?" said Percival, shrinking sensitively from one disclosure that might wound Helen in her kinswoman. "Meanwhile, dearest, you will be prudent—you will avoid this damp air, and keep quietly at home, and amuse yourself, sweet fancier of the future, in planning how to improve these old halls, when they and their unworthy master are your own. God bless you;—God guard you, Helen!"

He rose, and with that loyal chivalry of love which felt respect the more for the careless guardianship to which his Helen was entrusted, he refrained from that parting kiss which their pure courtship warranted — for which his lip yearned. But as he lingered an irresistible impulse moved Helen's heart. Mechanically she opened her arms, and her head sank upon his shoulder. In that embrace they remained some moments silent, and an angel might unreprovingly have heard their hearts beat through the stillness.

At length, Percival tore himself from those arms which

relaxed their imploring hold reluctantly; she heard his hurried step descend the stairs, and in a moment more the roll of the wheels in the court without; a dreary sense as of some utter desertion, some everlasting bereavement, chilled and appalled her. She stood motionless, as if turned to stone, on the floor; suddenly the touch of something warm on her hand—a plaining whine, awoke her attention; Percival's favourite dog missed his master, and had slunk for refuge to her. The dread sentiment of loneliness vanished in that humble companionship; and seating herself on the ground, she took the dog in her arms, and bending over it, wept in silence.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MURDER, TOWARDS HIS DESIGN, MOVES LIKE A GHOST.

THE reader will, doubtless have observed the consummate art with which the poisoner had hitherto advanced upon her prey. The design conceived from afar, and executed with elaborate stealth, defied every chance of detection, against which the ingenuity of practised villany could guard. Grant even that the deadly drugs should betray the nature of the death they inflicted, that by some unconjectured secret in the science of chemistry, the presence of those vegetable compounds which had hitherto baffled every known and positive test, in the posthumous examination of the most experienced surgeons, should be clearly ascertained, not one suspicion seemed likely to fall upon the ministrant of death. The medicines were never brought to Madame Dalibard, were never given by her hand; nothing ever tasted by the victim could be tracked to her aunt. The helpless condition of the cripple, which Lucretia had assumed, forbade all notion even of her power of movement. Only in the dead of night, when, as she believed, every human eye that could watch her was sealed in sleep, and then in those dark habiliments, which (even as might sometimes happen, if the victim herself

were awake), a chance ray of light struggling through chink or shutter could scarcely distinguish from the general gloom,—did she steal to the chamber, and infuse the colourless and tasteless liquid[1] in the morning draught, meant to bring strength and healing. Grant that the draught was untouched—that it was examined by the surgeon—that the fell admixture could be detected—suspicion would wander anywhere rather than to that crippled and helpless kinswoman, who could not rise from her bed without aid.

But now this patience was to be abandoned, the folds of the serpent were to coil in one fell clasp upon its prey.

Fiend as Lucretia had become, and hardened as were all her resolves by the discovery of her son, and her impatience to endow him with her forfeited inheritance, she yet shrank from the face of Helen that day; on the excuse of illness, she kept her room, and admitted only Varney, who stole in from time to time, with creeping step and haggard countenance, to sustain her courage or his own. And every time he entered, he found Lucretia sitting with Walter Ardworth's open letter in her hand, and turning with a preternatural excitement, that seemed almost like aberration of mind, from the grim and horrid topic which he invited, to thoughts of wealth, and power, and triumph, and exulting prophecies of the fame her son should achieve. He looked but on the blackness of the gulf, and shuddered; her vision overleapt it, and smiled on the misty palaces her fancy built beyond.

Late in the evening, before she retired to rest, Helen knocked gently at her aunt's door,—a voice quick and startled, bade her enter; she came in, with her sweet caressing look, and took Lucretia's hand, which struggled from the clasp. Bending over that haggard brow, she said, simply, yet to Lucretia's ear the voice seemed that of command: "Let me kiss you this night!" and her lips pressed that brow. The murderess shuddered, and closed her eyes; when she opened them, the angel visitor was gone.

Night deepened and deepened into those hours from the first

[1] The celebrated *acqua di Tufania* (Tufania water) was wholly without taste or colour.

of which we number the morn, though night still is at her full. Moonbeam and starbeam came through the casements, shyly, and fairylike, as on that night, when the murderess was young and crimeless—in deed, if not in thought—that night, when in the book of Leechcraft, she meted out the hours in which the life of her benefactor might still interpose between her passion and its end. Along the stairs, through the hall, marched the armies of light—noiseless and still and clear, as the judgments of God, amidst the darkness and shadow of mortal destinies. In one chamber alone, the folds, curtained close, forbade all but a single ray—that ray came direct, as the stream from a lantern, as the beam reflected back from an eye;—as an eye it seemed watchful, and steadfast, through the dark; it shot along the floor—it fell at the foot of the bed.

Suddenly, in the exceeding hush, there was a strange and ghastly sound—it was the howl of a dog! Helen started from her sleep. Percival's dog had followed her, into her room, it had coiled itself, grateful for the kindness, at the foot of the bed. Now it was on the pillow, she felt its heart beat against her hand; it was trembling; its hairs bristled up, and the howl changed into a shrill bark of terror and wrath. Alarmed, she looked round: quickly between her and that ray from the crevice, a shapeless darkness passed, and was gone! So undistinguishable, so without outline, that it had no likeness of any living form:—like a cloud, like a thought, like an omen, it came in gloom, and it vanished.

Helen was seized with a superstitious terror—the dog continued to tremble and growl low. All once more was still—the dog sighed itself to rest. The stillness, the solitude—the glimmer of the moon—all contributed yet more to appal the enfeebled nerves of the listening, shrinking girl. At length she buried her face under the clothes, and towards daybreak fell into a broken, feverish sleep, haunted with threatening dreams.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MESSENGER SPEEDS.

TOWARDS the afternoon of the following day, an elderly gentleman was seated in the coffee-room of an hotel at Southampton, engaged in writing a letter, while the waiter in attendance was employed on the wires that fettered the petulant spirit contained in a bottle of Schweppe's soda-water. There was something in the aspect of the old gentleman, and in the very tone of his voice, that inspired respect, and the waiter had cleared the other tables of their latest newspapers to place before him. He had only just arrived by the packet from Havre, and even the newspapers had not been to him that primary attraction they generally constitute to the Englishman returning to his bustling native land, which, somewhat to his surprise, has contrived to go on tolerably well during his absence.

We use our privilege of looking over his shoulder while he writes:—

"Here I am, then, dear Lady Mary, at Southampton, and within an easy drive of the old Hall! A file of Galignani's journals, which I found on the road between Marseilles and Paris, informed me, under the head of 'fashionable movements,' that Percival St. John, Esquire, was 'gone to his seat at Laughton.' According to my customary tactics of marching at once to the seat of action, I therefore made direct for Havre, instead of crossing from Calais, and I suppose I shall find our young gentleman engaged in the slaughter of hares and partridges. You see it is a good sign that he can leave London. Keep up your spirits, my dear friend. If Perce has been really duped and taken in—as all you mothers are so apt to fancy,—rely upon an old soldier to defeat the enemy and expose the *ruse*. But if, after all, the girl is such as he describes and believes,—innocent, artless, and worthy his affection—oh, then I range myself, with your own good heart, upon his side. Never will I run the risk of unsettling

a man's whole character for life by wantonly interfering with his affections. But there we are agreed.

"In a few hours I shall be with our dear boy, and his whole heart will come out clear and candid as when it beat under his midshipman's true-blue. In a day or two I shall make him take me to town, to introduce me to the whole nest of them. Then I shall report progress. Adieu, till then! Kind regards to your poor sister. I think we shall have a mild winter. Not one warning twinge as yet of the old rheumatism.

"Ever your devoted old friend

"And *preux chevalier*,

"H. GREVILLE."

The captain had completed his letter, sipped his soda-water, and was affixing to his communication his seal, when he heard the rattle of a post-chaise without. Fancying it was the one he had ordered, he went to the open window which looked on the street; but the chaise contained travellers, only halting to change horses. Somewhat to his surprise, and a little to his chagrin,—for the captain did not count on finding company at the Hall,—he heard one of the travellers in the chaise ask the distance to Laughton. The countenance of the questioner was not familiar to him. But leaving the worthy captain to question the landlord, without any satisfactory information, and to hasten the chaise for himself, we accompany the travellers on their way to Laughton. There were but two—the proper complement of a post-chaise—and they were both of the ruder sex. The elder of the two was a man of middle age, but whom the wear and tear of active life had evidently advanced towards the state called *elderly*. But there was still abundant life in his quick, dark eye; and that mercurial youthfulness of character, which in some happy constitutions seems to defy years and sorrow, evinced itself in a rapid play of countenance, and as much gesticulation as the narrow confines of the vehicle and the position of a traveller will permit. The younger man, far more grave in aspect and quiet in manner, leaned back in the corner with folded arms, and listened with respectful attention to his companion.

"Certainly, Dr. Johnson is right—great happiness in an English post-chaise properly driven! more exhilarating than a palanquin: '*Post equitem sedet atra cura*'—true only of such scrubby hacks as old Horace could have known. Black Care does not sit behind English posters—eh, my boy?" As he spoke this, the gentleman had twice let down the glass of the vehicle, and twice put it up again.

"Yet," he resumed, without noticing the brief, good-humoured reply of his companion—"yet this is an anxious business enough that we are about. I don't feel quite easy in my conscience. Poor Braddell's injunctions were very strict, and I disobey them. It is on your responsibility, John!"

"I take it without hesitation. All the motives for so stern a severance must have ceased, and is it not a sufficient punishment to find in that hoped for son, a——"

"Poor woman!" interrupted the elder gentleman, in whom we begin to recognise the *soi-disant* Mr. Tomkins—"true, indeed, too true. How well I remember the impression Lucretia Clavering first produced on me;—and to think of her now as a miserable cripple! By Jove, you are right, sir! Drive on, post-boy, quick, quick!"

There was a short silence.

The elder gentleman abruptly put his hand upon his companion's arm.

"What consummate acuteness—what patient research you have shown! What could I have done in this business without you? How often had that garrulous Mrs. Mivers bored me with Becky Carruthers, and the coral, and St. Paul's, and not a suspicion came across me;—a word was sufficient for you;—and then to track this unfeeling old Joplin from place to place, till you find her absolutely a servant under the very roof of Mrs. Braddell herself! Wonderful! Ah, boy, you will be an honour to the law, and to your country. And what a hard-hearted rascal you must think me to have deserted you so long."

"My dear father," said John Ardworth, tenderly—"your love now recompenses me for all. And ought I not rather to rejoice not to have known the tale of a mother's shame until I could half forget it on a father's breast?"

"John," said the elder Ardworth, with a choking voice—"I ought to wear sackcloth all my life, for having given you such a mother. When I think what I have suffered from the habit of carelessness in those confounded money matters (—'*irritamenta malorum*,' indeed!), I have only one consolation, that my patient, noble son is free from my vice. You would not believe what a well-principled, honourable fellow I was at your age, and yet, how truly I said to my poor friend, William Mainwaring, one day at Laughton (I remember it now)—'Trust me with anything else but half-a-guinea!' Why, sir, it was that fault that threw me into low company—that brought me in contact with my innkeeper's daughter at Limerick. I fell in love, and I married (for, with all my faults, I was never a seducer, John). I did not own my marriage; why should I?—my relatives had cut me already. You were born, and, hunted poor devil as I was, I forgot all by your cradle. Then, in the midst of my troubles, that ungrateful woman deserted me—then I was led to believe that it was not my own son whom I had kissed and blessed. Ah, but for that thought, should I have left you as I did? And even in infancy, you had the features only of your mother. Then, when the death of the adulteress set me free, and years afterwards, in India, I married again, and had new ties—my heart grew still harder to you. I excused myself by knowing that at least you were cared for, and trained to good by a better guide than I. But when, by so strange a hazard, the very priest who had confessed your mother on her deathbed (she was a Catholic), came to India, and (for he had known me at Limerick) recognised my altered person, and obeying his penitent's last injunctions, assured me that you were my son,—oh, John, then, believe me, I hastened back to England, on the wings of remorse! Love you, boy! I have left at Madras three children, young and fair, by a woman now in Heaven, who never wronged me, and, by my soul, John Ardworth, you are dearer to me than all!"

The father's head drooped on his son's breast as he spoke; then, dashing away his tears, he resumed:

"Ah, why would not Braddell permit me, as I proposed, to find for his son the same guardianship as that to which I

intrusted my own? but his bigotry besotted him;—a clergyman of the High Church,—that was worse than an atheist! I had no choice left to me but the roof of that she-hypocrite. Yet I ought to have come to England when I heard of the child's loss, braved duns and all; but I was money-making, money-making—retribution for money-wasting;—and—well, it's no use repenting!—and—and there is the lodge, the park, the old trees! Poor Sir Miles!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE SPY FLIES.

MEANWHILE at Laughton, there was confusion and alarm. Helen had found herself more than usually unwell in the morning; towards noon, the maid, who attended her, informed Madame Dalibard that she was afraid the poor young lady had much fever, and inquired if the doctor should be sent for. Madame Dalibard seemed surprised at the intelligence, and directed her chair to be wheeled into her niece's room, in order herself to judge of Helen's state. The maid, sure that the doctor would be summoned, hastened to the stables, and seeing Beck, instructed him to saddle one of the horses, and to await further orders. Beck kept her a few moments talking, while he saddled his horse, and then followed her into the house, observing that it would save time if he were close at hand.

"That is quite true," said the maid, "and you may as well wait in the corridor. Madame may wish to speak to you herself, and give you her own message or note to the Doctor."

Beck, full of gloomy suspicions, gladly obeyed; and while the maid entered the sick-chamber, stood anxiously without. Presently Varney passed him, and knocked at Helen's door; the maid half-opened it.

"How is Miss Mainwaring?" said he, eagerly.

"I fear she is worse, sir,—but Madame Dalibard does not think there is any danger."

"No danger! I am glad; but pray ask Madame Dalibard to let me see her for a few moments in her own room. If she come out I will wheel her chair to it. Whether there is danger or not we had better send for other advice than this country doctor, who has perhaps mistaken the case; tell her I am very uneasy, and beg her to join me immediately."

"I think you are quite right, sir;" said the maid, closing the door.

Varney then turning round for the first time, noticed Beck, and said, roughly—

"What do you do here? Wait below till you are sent for."

Beck pulled his forelock, and retreated back, not in the direction of the principal staircase, but towards that used by the servants, and which his researches into the topography of the mansion had now made known to him. To gain these back stairs he had to pass Lucretia's room; the door stood ajar; Varney's face was turned from him. Beck breathed hard, looked round, then crept within, and in a moment, was behind the folds of the tapestry.

Soon the chair in which sat Madame Dalibard was drawn by Varney himself into the room.

Shutting the door with care, and turning the key, Gabriel said, with low, suppressed passion,

"Well; your mind seems wandering—speak!"

"It is strange," said Lucretia, in hollow tones, "can Nature turn accomplice, and befriend us here?"

"Nature! did you not last night administer the——"

"No," interrupted Lucretia. "No; she came into the room—she kissed me here, on the brow that even then was meditating murder. The kiss burned; it burns still—it eats into the brain like remorse. But I did not yield—I read again her false father's protestation of love—I read again the letter announcing the discovery of my son, and remorse lay still—I went forth as before—I stole into her chamber—I had the fatal crystal in my hand——"

"Well! well!"

"And suddenly there came the fearful howl of a dog;

and the dog's fierce eyes glared on me; I paused—I trembled; Helen started, woke, called aloud—I turned and fled. The poison was not given."

Varney ground his teeth. "But this illness! Ha! the effect perhaps, of the drops administered two nights ago."

"No! this illness has no symptoms like those the poison should bequeath; it is but natural fever, a shock on the nerves; she told me she had been wakened by the dog's howl, and seen a dark form, like a thing from the grave, creeping along the floor. But she is really ill—send for the physician; there is nothing in her illness to betray the hand of man. Be it as it may—that kiss still burns—I will stir in this no more. Do what you will yourself!"

"Fool! fool!" exclaimed Varney, almost rudely grasping her arm. "Remember how much we have yet to prepare for—how much to do—and the time so short! Percival's return—perhaps this Greville's arrival. Give me the drugs, I will mix them for her in the potion the physician sends. And when Percival returns—his Helen dead or dying—*I* will attend on *him!* Silent still? Recall your son! Soon you will clasp him in your arms as a beggar, or as the lord of Laughton!"

Lucretia shuddered, but did not rise; she drew forth a ring of keys from her bosom, and pointed towards a secretary. Varney snatched the keys, unlocked the secretary, seized the fatal casket, and sat down quietly before it.

When the dire selections were made, and secreted about his person, Varney rose, approached the fire, and blew the wood embers to a blaze.

"And now," he said, with his icy irony of smile, "we may dismiss these useful instruments—perhaps for ever. Though Walter Ardworth, in restoring your son, leaves us dependent on that son's filial affection, and I may have, therefore, little to hope for from the succession, to secure which I have risked, and am again to risk my life, I yet trust to that influence which you never fail to obtain over others. I take it for granted, that when these halls are Vincent Braddell's we shall have no need of gold, nor of these pale alchemies. Perish, then, the

mute witnesses of our acts!—the elements we have bowed to our will! No poison shall be found in our hoards! Fire, consume your consuming children!"

As he spoke, he threw upon the hearth the contents of the casket, and set his heel upon the logs. A bluish flame shot up, breaking into countless sparks, and then died.

Lucretia watched him without speaking.

In coming back towards the table, Varney felt something hard beneath his tread; he stooped, and picked up the ring which has before been described as amongst the ghastly treasures of the casket, and which had rolled on the floor almost to Lucretia's feet, as he had emptied the contents on the hearth.

"This, at least, need tell no tales," said he; "a pity to destroy so rare a piece of workmanship,—one, too, which we never can replace!"

"Ay," said Lucretia, abstractedly—"and if detection comes, it may secure a refuge from the gibbet. Give me the ring!"

"A refuge more terrible than the detection," said Varney—"beware of such a thought," as Lucretia, taking it from his hand, placed the ring on her finger.

"And now I leave you for a while to recollect yourself—to compose your countenance and your thoughts. I will send for the physician."

Lucretia, with her eyes fixed on the floor, did not heed him, and he withdrew.

So motionless was her attitude,—so still her very breathing,—that the unseen witness behind the tapestry, who, while struck with horror at what he had overheard (the general purport of which it was impossible that he could misunderstand), was parched with impatience to escape to rescue his beloved master from his impending fate, and warn him of the fate hovering nearer still over Helen, ventured to creep along the wall to the threshold—to peer forth from the arras, and seeing her eyes still downcast, to emerge, and place his hand on the door. At that very moment Lucretia looked up, and saw him gliding from the tapestry; their eyes met—his were fascinated as the bird's by the snake's. At the sight, all her craft, her intellect, returned. With a glance, she comprehended the terrible danger that

awaited her. Before he was aware of her movement, she was at his side—her hand on his own—her voice in his ear.

"Stir not a step—utter not a sound—or you are ——"

Beck did not suffer her to proceed. With the violence rather of fear than of courage, he struck her to the ground: but she clung to him still; and, though rendered for the moment speechless by the suddenness of the blow, her eyes took an expression of unspeakable cruelty and fierceness. He struggled with all his might to shake her off; as he did so, she placed feebly her other hand upon the wrist of the lifted arm that had smitten her, and he felt a sharp pain, as if the nails had fastened into the flesh. This but exasperated him to new efforts. He extricated himself from her grasp, which relaxed as her lips writhed into a smile of scorn and triumph, and, spurning her while she lay before the threshold, he opened the door, sprang forward, and escaped. No thought had he of tarrying in that House of Pelops, those human shambles,—of denouncing Murder in its lair; to fly to reach his master, warn and shield him—that was the sole thought which crossed his confused, bewildered brain.

It might be from four to five minutes that Lucretia, half-stunned, half-senseless, lay upon those floors; for, besides the violence of her fall, the shock of the struggle upon nerves weakened by the agony of apprehension, occasioned by the imminent and unforeseen chance of detection, paralysed her wondrous vigour of mind and frame—when Varney entered.

"They tell me she sleeps," he said, in hoarse muttered accents, before he saw the prostrate form at his very feet. But Varney's step—Varney's voice, had awakened Lucretia's reason to consciousness, and the sense of peril. Rising, though with effort, she related hurriedly what had passed.

"Fly!—fly!" she gasped, as she concluded. "Fly—to detain, to secrete this man somewhere for the next few hours. Silence him but till then—I have done the rest!"—and her finger pointed to the fatal ring. Varney waited for no farther words; he hurried out, and made at once to the stables: his shrewdness conjectured that Beck would carry his tale elsewhere. The groom was already gone (his fellows said) without a word, but towards the lodge that led to the Southampton road. Varney

ordered the swiftest horse the stables held to be saddled, and said, as he sprang on his back,—

"I, too, must go towards Southampton—the poor young lady! —I must prepare your master—he is on his road back to us;" and the last word was scarce out of his lips, as the sparks flew from the flints under the horse's hoofs, and he spurred from the yard.

As he rode at full speed through the park, the villain's mind sped more rapidly than the animal he bestrode—sped from fear to hope—hope to assurance. Grant that the spy lived to tell his tale—incoherent, improbable as the tale would be—who would believe it? How easy to meet tale by tale! The man must own that he was secreted behind the tapestry;—wherefore but to rob? Detected by Madame Dalibard, he had coined this wretched fable. And the spy, too, could not live through the day—he bore Death with him as he rode—he fed its force by his speed—and the effects of the venom itself would be those of frenzy. Tush! his tale, at best, would seem but the ravings of delirium. Still, it was well to track him where he went,—delay him, if possible; and Varney's spurs plunged deep and deeper into the bleeding flanks: on desperately scoured the horse. He passed the lodge—he was on the road—a chaise and pair dashed by him—he heard not a voice exclaim "Varney!"—he saw not the wondering face of John Ardworth;—bending over the tossing mane—he was deaf, he was blind, to all without and around. A milestone glides by, another, and a third. Ha! his eyes can see now. The object of his chase is before him—he views distinctly; on the brow of yon hill, the horse and the rider, spurring fast, like himself. They descend the hill, horse and horseman, and are snatched from his sight. Up the steep strains the pursuer. He is at the summit. He sees the fugitive before him, almost within hearing. Beck has slackened his steed; he seems swaying to and fro in the saddle. Ho, ho! the barbed ring begins to work in his veins! Varney looks round—not another soul is in sight—a deep wood skirts the road. Place and time seem to favour—Beck has reined in his horse—he bends low over the saddle as if about to fall. Varney utters a half-suppressed cry of triumph, shakes his reins, and spurs on—when, suddenly (by

the curve of the road, hid before), another chaise comes in sight, close where Beck had wearily halted.

The chaise stops—Varney pulls in, and draws aside to the hedgerow! Some one within the vehicle is speaking to the fugitive! May it not be St. John himself? To his rage and his terror, he sees Beck painfully dismount from his horse—sees him totter to the door of the chaise—sees a servant leap from the box, and help him up the step—sees him enter. It *must* be Percival on his return! Percival, to whom he tells that story of horror! Varney's brute-like courage forsook him—his heart was appalled. In one of those panics so common with that boldness which is but animal, his sole thought became that of escape. He turned his horse's head to the fence—forced his way desperately through the barrier—made into the wood, and sat there cowering and listening, till in another minute he heard the wheels rattle on, and the horses gallop hard down the hill towards the park.

The autumn wind swept through the trees—it shook the branches of the lofty ash that overhung the Accursed One. What observer of nature knows not that peculiar sound which the ash gives forth in the blast—not the solemn groan of the oak—not the hollow murmur of the beech, but a shrill wail—a shriek as of a human voice in sharp anguish. Varney shuddered, as if he had heard the death-cry of his intended victims! Through briars and thickets, torn by the thorns, bruised by the boughs—he plunged deeper and deeper into the wood—gained at length the main path cut through it—found himself in a lane, and rode on, careless whither, till he had reached a small town, about ten miles from Laughton, where he resolved to wait till his nerves had recovered their tone, and he could more calmly calculate the chances of safety.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LUCRETIA REGAINS HER SON.

IT seemed as if now, when danger became most imminent and present—that that very danger served to restore to Lucretia Dalibard her faculties, which during the earlier day had been steeped in a kind of dreary stupor. The absolute necessity of playing out her execrable part with all suitable and consistent hypocrisy, braced her into iron. But the disguise she assumed was a supernatural effort—it stretched to cracking every fibre of the brain. It seemed almost to herself, as if, her object once gained, either life or consciousness could hold out no more!

A chaise stopped at the porch—two gentlemen descended. The elder paused irresolutely, and at length, taking out a card, inscribed "Mr. Walter Ardworth," said, "If Madame Dalibard can be spoken to for a moment, will you give her this card?"

The footman hesitatingly stared at the card, and then invited the gentleman into the hall, while he took up the message. Not long had the visitor to wait, pacing the dark oak floors and gazing on the faded banners, before the servant reappeared —Madame Dalibard would see him. He followed his guide up the stairs; while his young companion turned from the hall, and seated himself musingly on one of the benches on the deserted terrace.

Grasping the arms of her chair with both hands, her eyes fixed eagerly on his face, Lucretia Dalibard awaited the welcome visitor.

Prepared as he had been for change, Walter was startled by the ghastly alteration in Lucretia's features, increased, as it was at that moment, by all the emotions which raged within. He sank into the chair placed for him opposite Lucretia, and, clearing his throat, said, falteringly—

"I grieve indeed, madame, that my visit, intended to bring but joy, should chance thus inopportunely. The servant

informed me, as we came up the stairs, that your niece was ill, and I sympathise with your natural anxiety—Susan's only child, too—poor Susan!"

"Sir," said Lucretia, impatiently, "these moments are precious. Sir—sir,—my son—my son!" and her eyes glanced to the door. "You have brought with you a companion—does he wait without? —My son!"

"Madame, give me a moment's patience. I will be brief, and compress what in other moments, might be a long narrative, into a few sentences."

Rapidly, then, Walter Ardworth passed over the details, unnecessary now to repeat to the reader; the injunctions of Braddell, the delivery of the child to the woman selected by his fellow-sectarian (who, it seemed, by John Ardworth's recent inquiries was afterwards expelled the community, and who, there was reason to believe, had been the first seducer of the woman thus recommended). No clue to the child's parentage had been given to the woman, with the sum intrusted for his maintenance, which sum had perhaps been the main cause of her reckless progress to infamy and ruin. The narrator passed lightly over the neglect and cruelty of the nurse, to her abandonment of the child when the money was exhausted. Fortunately she had overlooked the coral round its neck. By that coral, and by the initials, V. B., which Ardworth had had the precaution to have burned into the child's wrist, the lost son had been discovered; the nurse herself (found in the person of Martha Skeggs, Lucretia's own servant) had been confronted with the woman to whom she gave the child, and recognised at once. Nor had it been difficult to obtain from her the confession which completed the evidence.

"In this discovery," concluded Ardworth, "the person I employed met your own agent, and the last links in the chain they traced together. But to *that* person,—to his zeal and intelligence,—you owe the happiness I trust to give you. He sympathised with me the more that he knew you personally, felt for your sorrows, and had a lingering belief that you supposed *him* to be the child you yearned for. Madame, thank my son for the restoration of your own!"

Without sound, Lucretia had listened to these details, though her countenance changed fearfully as the narrator proceeded. But now she groaned aloud and in agony.

"Nay, madame," said Ardworth, feelingly, and in some surprise, "surely the discovery of your son should create gladder emotions! Though, indeed, you will be prepared to find that the poor youth so reared wants education and refinement, I have heard enough to convince me that his dispositions are good and his heart grateful. Judge of this yourself; he is in these walls—he is——"

"Abandoned by a harlot—reared by a beggar! My son!" interrupted Lucretia, in broken sentences. "Well, sir, have you discharged your task! Well have you replaced a mother!"

Before Ardworth could reply, loud and rapid steps were heard in the corridor, and a voice, cracked, indistinct, but vehement. The door was thrown open, and, half-supported by Captain Greville, half dragging him along—his features convulsed, whether by pain or passion—the spy upon Lucretia's secrets, the denouncer of her crime, tottered to the threshold. Pointing to where she sat with his long, lean arm, Beck exclaimed—"Seize her! I 'cuse her, face to face, of the murder of her niece!—of—of I told you, sir—I told you——"

"Madame," said Captain Greville, "you stand charged by this witness with the most terrible of human crimes. I judge you not. Your niece, I rejoice to hear, yet lives! Pray God that her death be not traced to those kindred hands!"

Turning her eyes from one to the other with a wandering stare, Lucretia Dalibard remained silent. But there was still scorn on her lip, and defiance on her brow. At last she said slowly, and to Ardworth—

"Where is my son? You say, he is within these walls—call him forth to protect his mother! Give me, at least, my son—my son!"

Her last words were drowned by a fresh burst of fury from her denouncer. In all the coarsest invective his education could supply—in all the hideous vulgarities of his untutored dialect—in that uncurbed licentiousness of tone, look, and manner which passion, once aroused, gives to the dregs and scum of

the populace, Beck poured forth his frightful charges—his frantic execrations. In vain Captain Greville strove to check him. In vain Walter Ardworth sought to draw him from the room. But while the poor wretch—maddening not more with the consciousness of the crime, than with the excitement of the poison in his blood—thus raved and stormed, a terrible suspicion crossed Walter Ardworth: mechanically—as his grasp was on the accuser's arm—he bared the sleeve, and on the wrist were the dark blue letters, burned into the skin, and bearing witness to his identity with the lost Vincent Braddell.

"Hold, hold!" he exclaimed then—"hold, unhappy man!—it is your mother whom you denounce!"

Lucretia sprang up erect—her eyes seemed starting from her head; she caught at the arm pointed towards her in wrath and menace—and there, amidst those letters that proclaimed her son, was the small puncture surrounded by a livid circle, that announced her victim. In the same instant she discovered her child in the man who was calling down upon her head the hatred of Earth and the justice of Heaven, and knew herself his murderess!

She dropped the arm, and sank back on the chair; and, whether the poison had now reached to the vitals or whether so unwonted a passion in so frail a frame, sufficed for the death-stroke, Beck himself, with a low suffocated cry, slid from the hand of Ardworth, and tottering a step or so, the blood gushed from his mouth over Lucretia's robe;—his head drooped an instant, and, falling, rested first upon her lap—then struck heavily upon the floor. The two men bent over him, and raised him in their arms—his eyes opened and closed—his throat rattled, and as he fell back into their arms a corpse, a laugh rose close at hand—it rang through the walls, it was heard near and afar—above and below. Not an ear in that house that heard it not. In that laugh fled for ever, till the Judgment-day, from the blackened ruins of her lost soul, the reason of the murderess-mother.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LOTS VANISH WITHIN THE URN.

VARNEY'S self-commune restored to him his constitutional audacity. He returned to Laughton towards the evening, and held a long conference with Greville. Fortunately for him, perhaps, and happily for all, Helen had lost all more dangerous symptoms; and the physician, who was in the house, saw in her state nothing not easily to be accounted for by natural causes. Percival had arrived, had seen Helen—no wonder she was better. Both from him and from Helen, Madame Dalibard's fearful condition was for the present concealed. Ardworth's story, and the fact of Beck's identity with Vincent Braddell, were also reserved for a later occasion. . . . The tale which Beck had poured into the ear of Greville (when, recognising the St. John livery, the Captain stopped his chaise to inquire if Percival were at the Hall, and when thrilled by the hideous import of his broken reply, that gentleman had caused him to enter the vehicle to explain himself further), Varney, with his wonted art and address, contrived to strip of all probable semblance. Evidently the poor lad had been already delirious, his story must be deemed the nightmare of his disordered reason. Varney insisted upon surgical examination as to the cause of his death—the membranes of the brain were found surcharged with blood, as in cases of great mental excitement—the slight puncture in the wrist, ascribed to the prick of a rusty nail, provoked no suspicion. If some doubts remained still on Greville's acute mind, he was not eager to express, still less to act upon them. Helen was declared to be out of danger. Percival was safe—why affix by minute inquiry into the alleged guilt of Madame Dalibard (already so awfully affected by the death of her son and by the loss of her reason) so foul a stain on the honoured family of St. John? But Greville was naturally anxious to free the house as soon as possible, both of Varney and that ominous Lucretia, whose sojourn under its roof seemed

accursed. He therefore readily assented when Varney proposed —as his obvious and personal duty, to take charge of his mother-in-law, and remove her to London for immediate advice.

At the dead of the black-clouded night—no moon and no stars—the son of Olivier Dalibard bore away the form of the once-formidable Lucretia: the *form*, for the mind was gone —that teeming, restless, and fertile intellect, which had carried along the projects, with the preterhuman energies of the fiend, was hurled into night and chaos. Manacled and bound, for at times her paroxysms were terrible, and all partook of the destructive and murderous character which her faculties, when present, had betrayed, she was placed in the vehicle by the shrinking side of her accomplice.

Long before he arrived in London, Varney had got rid of his fearful companion. His chaise had stopped at the iron gates of a large building, somewhat out of the main road, and the doors of the Madhouse closed on Lucretia Dalibard.

Varney then hastened to Dover, with intention of flight into France; he was just about to step into the vessel, when he was tapped rudely on the shoulder, and a determined voice said—"Mr. Gabriel Varney, you are my prisoner!"

"For what?—some paltry debt?" said Varney, haughtily.

"For forgery on the Bank of England!"

Varney's hand plunged into his vest. The officer seized it in time, and wrested the blade from his grasp. Once arrested for an offence it was impossible to disprove, although the very smallest of which his conscience might charge him, Varney sank into the blackest despair. Though he had often boasted, not only to others, but to his own vain breast, of the easy courage with which, when life ceased to yield enjoyment, he could dismiss it by the act of his own will,—though he had possessed himself of Lucretia's murderous ring, and death, if fearful, was therefore at his command, self-destruction was the last thought that occurred to him; that morbid excitability of fancy, which, whether in his art or in his deeds, had led him to strange delight in horror, now served but to haunt him with the images of death in those ghastliest shapes familiar to them who look only into the bottom of

the charnel, and see but the rat and the worm, and the loathsome agencies of corruption. It was not the despair of conscience that seized him, it was the abject clinging to life—not the remorse of the soul—*that* still slept within him, too noble an agency for one so debased—but the gross physical terror. As the fear of the tiger once aroused is more paralysing than that of the deer, proportioned to the savageness of a disposition to which fear is a novelty, so the very boldness of Varney, coming only from the perfection of the nervous organization, and unsupported by one moral sentiment, once struck down, was corrupted into the vilest cowardice. With his audacity, his shrewdness forsook him. Advised by his lawyer to plead guilty, he obeyed, and the sentence of transportation for life gave him at first a feeling of reprieve; but when his imagination began to picture, in the darkness of his cell, all the true tortures of that penalty, not so much, perhaps, to the uneducated peasant felon, inured to toil, and familiarised with coarse companionship, as to one pampered like himself by all soft and half-womanly indulgences —the shaven hair,—the convict's dress,—the rigorous privation, the drudging toil—the exile seemed as grim as the grave. In the dotage of faculties smitten into drivelling, he wrote to the Home Office, offering to disclose secrets connected with crimes that had hitherto escaped or baffled justice, on condition that his sentence might be repealed, or mitigated into the gentler forms of ordinary transportation. No answer was returned to him—but his letter provoked research; circumstances connected with his uncle's death, and with various other dark passages in his life, sealed against him all hope of a more merciful sentence; and when some acquaintances, whom his art had made for him, and who, while grieving for his crime, saw in it some excuses (ignorant of his feller deeds), sought to intercede in his behalf, the reply of the Home Office was obvious: "He is a fortunate man to have been tried and condemned for his least offence." Not one indulgence that could distinguish him from the most execrable ruffian condemned to the same sentence was conceded.

The idea of the gibbet lost all its horror. Here was a gibbet

for every hour. No hope—no escape. Already that Future Doom which comprehends the "For ever" opened upon him black and fathomless. The hour-glass was broken up—the hand of the timepiece was arrested. The Beyond stretched before him, without limit, without goal—on into Annihilation or into Hell.

EPILOGUE TO PART THE SECOND.

STAND, O Man! upon the hill-top—in the stillness of the evening hour—and gaze, not with joyous, but with contented eyes, upon the beautiful world around thee! See, where the mists, soft and dim, rise over the green meadows, through which the rivulet steals its way! See where, broadest and stillest, the wave expands to the full smile of the setting sun—and the willow that trembles on the breeze—and the oak that stands firm in the storm, are reflected back, peaceful both, from the clear glass of the tides! See, where, begirt by the gold of the harvests, and backed by the pomp of a thousand groves—the roofs of the town, bask, noiseless, in the calm glow of the sky. Not a sound from those abodes floats in discord to thine ear—only from the church-tower, soaring high above the rest, perhaps, faintly heard through the stillness, swells the note of the holy bell. Along the mead, low skims the swallow—on the wave, the silver circlet, breaking into spray, shows the sport of the fish. See, the Earth, how serene, though all eloquent of activity and life! See the Heavens, how benign, though dark clouds, by yon mountain, blend the purple with the gold! Gaze contented, for Good is around thee—not joyous, for Evil is the shadow of Good! Let thy soul pierce through the veil of the senses, and thy sight plunge deeper than the surface which gives delight to thine eye. Below the glass of that river, the pike darts on his prey; the circle in the wave, the soft plash amongst the reeds, are but signs of Destroyer and Victim. In the ivy round the oak by the margin, the owl hungers for the night, which shall give its beak and its talons living food for its young; and the spray of the willow trembles with the wing of the redbreast,

whose bright eye sees the worm on the sod. Canst thou count too, O Man! all the cares—all the sins—that those noiseless rooftops conceal? With every curl of that smoke to the sky, a human thought soars as dark, a human hope melts as briefly. And the bell from the church-tower, that to thy ear gives but music, perhaps knolls for the dead. The swallow but chases the moth, and the cloud that deepens the glory of the heaven, and the sweet shadows on the earth, nurses but the thunder that shall rend the grove, and the storm that shall devastate the harvests. Not with fear, not with doubt, recognise, O Mortal, the presence of Evil in the world.[1] Hush thy heart in the humbleness of awe, that its mirror may reflect as serenely the shadow as the light. Vainly, for its moral, dost thou gaze on the landscape, if thy soul puts no check on the dull delight of the senses. Two wings only raise thee to the summit of Truth, where the Cherub shall comfort the sorrow, where the Seraph shall enlighten the joy. Dark as ebon spreads the one wing; white as snow gleams the other—mournful as thy *reason* when it descends into the deep—exulting as thy *faith* when it springs to the day-star.

Beck sleeps in the churchyard of Laughton. He had lived to frustrate the monstrous design intended to benefit himself, and to become the instrument, while the victim, of the dread Eumenides. That done, his life passed with the crimes that had gathered around, out of the sight of mortals. Helen slowly regained her health in the atmosphere of love and happiness; and Lady Mary soon learned to forget the fault of the father in the virtues of the child. Married to Percival, Helen fulfilled the destinies of woman's genius, in calling forth into action man's earnest duties. She breathed into Percival's warm beneficent heart her own more steadfast and divine intelligence. Like him she grew ambitious, by her he became distinguished. While I write, fair children play under the cedars of Laughton. And the husband tells the daughters to resemble their mother; and

[1] Not, indeed, that the evil here narrated is the *ordinary* evil of the world. The lesson it inculcates would be lost, if so construed; but that the mystery of evil, whatever its degree, only increases the necessity of faith in the vindication of the contrivance which requires infinity for its range, and eternity for its consummation. It is in the existence of evil that man finds his duties, and his soul its progress.

the wife's highest praise to the boys is "You have spoken truth, or done good, like your father."

John Ardworth has not paused in his career, nor belied the promise of his youth. Though the elder Ardworth, partly by his own exertions, partly by his second marriage with the daughter of the French merchant (through whose agency he had corresponded with Fielden), had realised a moderate fortune, it but sufficed for his own wants, and for the children of his later nuptials, upon whom the bulk of it was settled. Hence, happily perhaps for himself and others, the easy circumstances of his father allowed to John Ardworth no exemption from labour. His success in the single episode from active life to literature, did not intoxicate or mislead him. He knew that his real element was not in the field of letters but in the world of men. Not undervaluing the noble destinies of the author, he felt that those destinies, if realised to the utmost, demanded powers other than his own; and that man is only true to his genius when the genius is at home in his career. He would not renounce for a brief celebrity distant and solid fame. He continued for a few years, in patience and privation, and confident self-reliance, to drudge on, till the occupation for the intellect fed by restraint, and the learning accumulated by study, came and found the whole man developed and prepared. Then, he rose rapidly from step to step—then, still retaining his high enthusiasm, he enlarged his sphere of action from the cold practice of law, into those vast social improvements which law, rightly regarded, should lead, and vivify, and create. Then, and long before the twenty years he had imposed on his probation had expired, he gazed again upon the senate and the abbey, and saw the doors of the one open to his resolute tread, and anticipated the glorious sepulchre, which heart and brain should win him in the other.

John Ardworth has never married. When Percival rebukes him for his celibacy, his lip quivers slightly, and he applies himself with more dogged earnestness to his studies or his career. But he never complains that his lot is lonely or his affections void. For him who aspires, and for him who loves, life may lead through the thorns, but it never stops in the desert.

On the minor personages involved in this history, there is

little need to dwell. Mr. Fielden, thanks to St. John, has obtained a much better living in the rectory of Laughton; but has found new sources of pleasant trouble for himself in seeking to drill into the mind of Percival's eldest son the elements of Euclid, and the principles of Latin syntax.

We may feel satisfied that the Miverses will go on much the same while trade enriches without refining, and while, nevertheless, right feelings in the common paths of duty may unite charitable emotions with graceless language.

We may rest assured that the poor widow who had reared the lost son of Lucretia received from the bounty of Percival all that could comfort her for his death.

We have no need to track the dull crimes of Martha, or the quick, cunning vices of Grabman, to their inevitable goals, in the hospital or the prison, the dunghill or the gibbet.

Of the elder Ardworth our parting notice may be less brief. We first saw him in sanguine and generous youth, with higher principles and clearer insight into honour than William Mainwaring. We have seen him next a spendthrift and a fugitive, his principles debased and his honour dimmed. He presents to us no uncommon example of the corruption engendered by that vulgar self-indulgence which mortgages the morrow for the pleasures of to-day. No Deity presides where Prudence is absent. Man, a world in himself, requires for the development of his faculties patience; and for the balance of his actions, order. Even where he had deemed himself most oppressively made the martyr, viz., in the profession of mere political opinions, Walter Ardworth had but followed out into theory the restless, uncalculating impatience which had brought adversity on his manhood, and, despite his constitutional cheerfulness, shadowed his age with remorse. The death of the child committed to his charge, long (perhaps to the last) embittered his pride in the son whom, without merit of his own, Providence had spared to a brighter fate. But for the faults which had banished him his country, and the habits which had seared his sense of duty, could that child have been so abandoned, and have so perished?

It remains only to cast our glance over the punishments which

befell the sensual villany of Varney,—the intellectual corruption of his fell stepmother.

These two persons had made a very trade of those crimes to which man's law awards death. They had said in their hearts that they would dare the crime, but elude the penalty. By wonderful subtlety, craft, and dexterity, which reduced guilt to a science, Providence seemed, as in disdain of the vulgar instruments of common retribution, to concede to them that which they had schemed for—escape from the rope and gibbet. Varney, saved from detection of his darker and more inexpiable crimes, punished only for the least one, retained what had seemed to him the master boon—life! Safer still from the law, no mortal eye had plumbed the profound night of Lucretia's awful guilt. Murderess of husband and son, the blinded law bade her go unscathed, unsuspected. Direct, as from heaven, without a cloud, fell the thunderbolt. Is the life they have saved worth the prizing? Doth the chalice, unspilt on the ground, not return to the hand? Is the sudden pang of the hangman more fearful than the doom which they breathe and bear? Look, and judge.

Behold that dark ship on the waters! Its burthens are not of Ormus and Tyre. No goodly merchandise doth it waft over the wave,—no blessing cleaves to its sails; freighted with terror and with guilt, with remorse and despair, or, more ghastly than either, the sullen apathy of souls hardened into stone, it carries the dregs and offal of the old world to populate the new. On a bench in that ship sit side by side two men, companions assigned to each other. Pale, abject, cowering—all the bravery rent from his garb, all the gay insolence vanished from his brow—can that hollow-eyed, haggard wretch be the same man whose senses opened on every joy, whose nerves mocked at every peril? But beside him, with a grin of vile glee on his features, all muscle and brawn in the form, all malice, at once spiteful and dull, in the heavy eye, sits his fit comrade—the Gravestealer! At the first glance each had recognised each, and the prophecy and the vision rushed back upon the daintier convict. If he seek to escape from him, the Gravestealer claims him as a prey,—he threatens him with his eye as a slave,—he

kicks him with his hoof as they sit, and laughs at the writhings of the pain. Carry on your gaze from the ship,—hear the cry from the masthead,—see the land arise from the waste!—a land without hope. At first, despite the rigour of the Home Office, the education and intelligence of Varney have their price—the sole crime for which he is convicted is not of the darkest. He escapes from that hideous comrade,—he can teach as a schoolmaster; let his brain work, not his hands! But the most irredeemable of convicts are ever those of nurture, and birth and culture better than the ruffian rest. You may enlighten the clod, but the meteor still must feed on the marsh,—and the pride, and the vanity, work where the crime itself seems to lose its occasion. Ever avid—ever grasping, he falls, step by step, in the foul sink, and the colony sees in Gabriel Varney its most pestilent rogue,—arch-convict amidst convicts,—doubly lost amongst the damned! they banish him to the sternest of the penal settlements,—they send him forth with the vilest to break stones upon the roads. Shrivelled, and bowed, and old, prematurely—see that sharp face peering forth amongst that gang, scarcely human,—see him cringe to the lash of the scornful overseer,—see the pairs chained together, night and day! Ho, ho! his comrade hath found him again—the Artist and the Gravestealer leashed together! Conceive that fancy, so nurtured by habit—those tastes, so womanised by indulgence,—the one suggesting the very horrors that are not—the other revolting at all toil as a torture.

But intellect, not all gone, though hourly dying heavily down to the level of the brute, yet schemes for delivery and escape. Let the plot ripen, and the heart bound; break his chain—set him free—send him forth to the wilderness! Hark, the whoop of the wild men! See those things that ape our species dance and gibber round the famishing hunted wretch. Hark, how he shrieks at the torture! How they tear, and they pinch, and they burn, and they rend him! They, too, spare his life—it is charmed! A Caliban amidst Calibans, they heap him with their burthens, and feed him on their offal. Let him live; he loved life for himself he has cheated the gibbet—LET HIM LIVE! Let him watch, let him once more escape; all naked and

mangled, let him wander back to the huts of his gang. Lo! where he kneels, the foul tears streaming down, and cries aloud, "I have broken all your laws, I will tell you all my crimes; I ask but one sentence—hang me up—let me die!" And from the gang groan many voices,—"Hang us up—let us die!" The overseer turns on his heel, and Gabriel Varney again is chained to the laughing Gravestealer.

You enter those gates so jealously guarded,—you pass, with a quick beat of the heart, by those groups on the lawn, though they are harmless; you follow your guide through those passages; where the open doors will permit, you see the emperor brandish his sceptre of straw—hear the speculator counting his millions—sigh, where the maiden sits smiling, the return of her shipwrecked lover—or gravely shake the head and hurry on, where the fanatic raves his Apocalypse, and reigns in judgment on the world;—you pass by strong gates into corridors gloomier and more remote. Nearer and nearer, you hear the yell, and the oath and blaspheming curse — you are in the heart of the Madhouse, where they chain those at once cureless and dangerous—who have but sense enough left them to smite, and to throttle and to murder. Your guide opens that door, massive as a wall: you see (as we, who narrate, have seen her) Lucretia Dalibard:—a grisly, squalid, ferocious mockery of a human being—more appalling and more fallen than Dante ever fabled in his spectres, than Swift ever scoffed in his Ya-hoos!—Only where all other feature seems to have lost its stamp of humanity, still burns with unquenchable fever—the red devouring eye. That eye never seems to sleep, or in sleep, the lid never closes over it. As you shrink from its light, it seems to you as if the mind that had lost coherence and harmony, still retained latent and incommunicable *consciousness* as its curse. For days, for weeks—that awful maniac will preserve obstinate, unbroken silence; but, as the eye never closes, so the hands never rest—they open and grasp, as if at some palpable object on which they close, vice-like, as a bird's talons on its prey—sometimes they wander over that brow, where the furrows seem torn as the thunder-scars, as if to wipe from it a stain, or charm from it a pang—sometimes they gather up the hem of that sordid robe.

and seem, for hours together, striving to rub from it a soil. Then, out from prolonged silence, without cause or warning, will ring, peal after peal (till the frame, exhausted with the effort sinks senseless into stupor), the frightful laugh. But speech, intelligible and coherent, those lips rarely yield.

There are times, indeed, when the attendants are persuaded that her mind in part returns to her; and those times experience has taught them to watch with peculiar caution. The crisis evinces itself by a change in the manner—by a quick apprehension of all that is said—by a straining, anxious look at the dismal walls—by a soft fawning docility—by murmured complaints of the chains that fetter—and (though, as we have said, but very rarely) by prayers, that seem rational, for greater ease and freedom.

In the earlier time of her dread captivity, perhaps, when it was believed at the asylum that she was a patient of condition with friends who cared for her state, and would liberally reward her cure,—they, in those moments, relaxed her confinement, and sought the gentler remedies their art employs; but then invariably, and, it was said, with a cunning that surpassed all the proverbial astuteness of the mad, she turned this indulgence to the most deadly uses—she crept to the pallet of some adjacent sufferer weaker than herself, and the shrieks that brought the attendants into the cell scarcely saved the intended victim from her hands. It seemed, in those imperfectly lucid intervals, as if the reason only returned to guide her to destroy—only to animate the broken mechanism into the beast of prey.

Years have now passed since her entrance within those walls. He who placed her there never had returned—he had given a false name—no clue to him was obtained—the gold he had left was but the quarter's pay. When Varney had been first apprehended, Percival requested the younger Ardworth to seek the forger in prison—and to question him as to Madame Dalibard; but Varney was then so apprehensive that, even if still insane, her very ravings might betray his share in her crimes, or still more, if she recovered, that the remembrance of her son's murder would awaken the repentance and the confession of crushed despair, that the wretch had judged it wiser to say that

his accomplice was no more—that her insanity had already terminated in death. The place of her confinement thus continued a secret locked in his own breast. Egotist to the last, she was henceforth dead to him—why not to the world? Thus the partner of her crimes had cut off her sole resource, in the compassion of her unconscious kindred; thus the gates of the living world were shut to her evermore. Still, in a kind of compassion, or as an object of experiment—as a subject to be dealt with unscrupulously in that living dissection-hall—her grim gaolers did not grudge her an asylum. But, year after year, the attendance was more slovenly—the treatment more harsh; and strange to say, while the features were scarcely recognisable—while the form underwent all the change which the shape suffers when mind deserts it, that prodigious vitality which belonged to the temperament still survived. No signs of decay are yet visible. Death, as if spurning the carcass, stands inexorably afar off. Baffler of man's law, *thou*, too, hast escaped with life! Not for thee is the sentence, "Blood for blood!" Thou livest—thou mayst pass the extremest boundaries of age. Live on, to wipe the blood from thy robe!—LIVE ON!

Not for the coarse object of creating an idle terror—not for the shock upon the nerves and the thrill of the grosser interest which the narrative of crime creates, has this book been compiled from the facts and materials afforded to the author. When the great German poet describes, in not the least noble of his lyrics, the sudden apparition of some "Monster Fate" in the circles of careless Joy, he assigns to him who teaches the world through parable or song, the right to invoke the spectre. It is well to be awakened at times from the easy commonplace that surrounds our habitual life—to cast broad and steady and patient light on the darker secrets of the heart; on the vaults and caverns of the social state, over which we build the market-place and the palace. We recover from the dread, and the awe, and the half-incredulous wonder, to set closer watch upon our inner and hidden selves. In him who cultivates only the reason, and suffers the heart and the spirit to lie waste and dead, who schemes and constructs, and revolves round the axle of self, unwarmed by the affections, unpoised by the attraction

of right,—lies the germ Fate might ripen into the guilt of Olivier Dalibard. Let him who but lives through the senses, spread the wings of the fancy in the gaudy glare of enjoyment corrupted, avid to seize, and impatient to toil, whose faculties are curbed but to the range of physical perception, whose very courage is but the strength of the nerves, who develops but the animal as he stifles the man,—let him gaze on the villany of Varney, and startle to see some magnified shadow of himself thrown dimly on the glass! Let those who, with powers to command and passions to wing the powers, would sweep without scruple from the aim to the end—who, trampling beneath their footprint of iron the humanities that bloom up in their path—would march to success with the proud stride of the destroyer, hear, in the laugh of yon maniac murderess, the glee of the fiend they have wooed to their own souls! Guard well, O Heir of Eternity, the portal of sin—the *thought!* From the thought to the deed, the subtler thy brain, and the bolder thy courage, the briefer and straighter is the way. Read these pages in disdain of self-commune—they shall revolt thee not instruct; read them, looking steadfastly within, and how humble soever the art of the narrator, the facts he narrates, like all history, shall teach by example. Every human act, good or ill, is an Angel to guide or to warn;[1] and the deeds of the worst have messages from Heaven to the listening hearts of the best. Amidst the glens in the Apennine,—in the lone wastes of Calabria, the sign of the Cross marks the spot where a deed of violence has been done; on all that pass by the road, the symbol has varying effect; sometimes it startles the conscience, sometimes it invokes the devotion; the robber drops the blade, the priest counts the rosary. So is it with the record of crime: and in the witness of Guilt, Man is thrilled with the whisper of Religion.

[1] "Our acts our Angels are—or good or ill;
The fatal shadows that walk by us still."
FLETCHER.

THE END.